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# THE REALISM OF JESUS

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J. ALEXANDER FINDLAY





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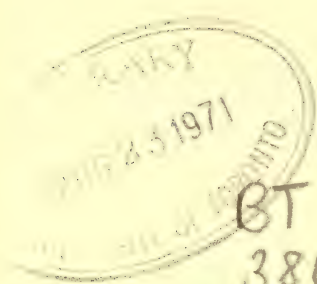
*A Paraphrase and Exposition of the  
Sermon on the Mount*

BY

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## NOTE BY THE AUTHOR

THE paraphrase of the three chapters of the First Gospel containing the "Sermon on the Mount" appeared as one of a series of "Fellowship Manuals" published by the "Epworth Press." My thanks are due both to the "Epworth Press" and to the editors of the series of "Fellowship Manuals" for their kind permission to include the paraphrase in this volume. Its object is not to take the place of any ancient or modern translation of the "Sermon," but to express what I take to be the thoughts of Jesus in the current colloquial language of our time. There is no attempt at word-by-word translation; my motive has been to bring out as much as possible of what is suggested without adding or omitting anything. The studies which follow the paraphrase first appeared in *The Methodist Times*, though they have been considerably expanded for republication. I am glad to bear testimony to the kindness of the editor of that paper; he has not only allowed, but urged their reissue.

The leading idea of these studies is that the ideal described by Jesus is not so much a "counsel of perfection" as the only really wholesome and natural way of life possible for men with natures like ours in a world like this; that the appeal of the Teacher is never merely to questionable theory, but to facts which all men acknowledge. I have tried honestly to face the difficul-

ties which seem most real to me, but such exposition as I have attempted is deliberately untechnical and concerns actual life rather than pure thought. The giving of references is avoided of set purpose, because the aim of the studies contained in this volume is exclusively practical. Readers of *Jesus as they saw Him* will perhaps recognise some of the same ideas here; but the chief purpose of that volume was to interest readers in the Synoptic Gospels, and so bring them to the feet of the Saviour whose form and figure can be seen perhaps most clearly there; here I am concerned rather to try and shew the liveableness of the way of life He proclaims. I should like once more to thank my friends, and most of all, my teacher, Dr. Rendel Harris, for all the help, encouragement and direction they continue to give me.

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# THE REALISM OF JESUS



# THE REALISM OF JESUS

## The Sermon on the Mount

### *A Paraphrase*

*Chapter 5.*—When He saw the crowds gathering He went up to higher ground; there He sat down, and when His disciples had come up to Him, He opened His heart to them, saying in the course of His teaching: "I have good news for the lowly-minded, to them belongs the new age that God is bringing in; for mourners—there is good cheer in store for them; for the patient and forbearing—theirs by native right is the lordship of the life of man; for those who are hungry and thirsty for the ideal life—they shall receive full satisfaction; for the brotherly—they shall be treated with brotherly consideration; for those who long for purity<sup>1</sup>—they shall look upon God's face; for peacemakers—they shall be called God's men in the world; to those who have ever suffered hardship in the cause of right—God's new world is their possession. That is why you should never fear persecution; indeed, when you have to put up with reproach, ill-treatment, every kind of slander, all because you will be My disciples, you should welcome your troubles

<sup>1</sup> Or "for the single-minded."

with exulting joy; you will be real prophets then, and God will reward such people as you in His own great way. You are the salt of Society; that is what you were meant for, to keep life wholesome, to make it bearable. No one has any use for insipid salt; people pitch the stuff into the street, and there is an end of it. You are all the light the world has; like yonder town on the hill-top, you cannot hide if you try. Even with the lamp at home, you do not light it, and then put it under a basin, but on the lampstand, so that everyone in the room may see by its light. Take care then that your light shines out in all men's sight, that they may not fail to be struck by the rightness of the things you do, and may come to thank God that they ever met you. Do not suppose that I have come to destroy the old religion; my mission is not to supersede the ancient sanctions, rather to unfold their deeper meaning. Mark this! the universe itself shall pass away before the smallest detail of God's law revealed in Scripture comes to be out of date; rather shall every part of it disclose a larger truth. It follows that the man whose teaching lessens the force of what seems to be the least important of God's laws, has a very humble place in the age which I proclaim; on the other hand, he whose practice and teaching enhance their authority shall have wide influence there. All the same, your living out of the moral law must go far beyond the code of conduct for which your professional moralists stand; only a new way of life can qualify you for the new world that is coming.

"I will illustrate My meaning; you know the old words of Scripture, 'You are not to commit murder';



your teachers go on to say, 'Whoever kills must stand his trial.' What I have to tell you is that everyone who persists in unreasonable anger with a brother-man, must stand his trial; whoever treats another with contempt shall be indicted for blasphemy; whoever curses another shall bring upon himself the doom he has invoked. And more than this; until you are on good terms with your brother, you must not bring your gift to God's altar; if you remember, when you have brought your gift, that he has anything against you, better leave your gift where it is, go and make friends with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Never lose a chance of making friends; if you are involved in a lawsuit, you should come to an understanding with your opponent on the way to court. Remember, God is judge; if you are responsible for prolonging the quarrel, it will be you He will condemn, whatever happens to the other man; the man who nurses ill-will always pays, and to the last penny too.

"Again the word of Scripture runs, 'You must not commit adultery.' What I have to say on this subject is; everyone who casts upon a woman a lustful look has already in his heart seduced her. If some passion of this kind is your hindrance, you must tear yourself away from it at all costs; better live a thwarted life, than with all your bodily powers about you, to be plunged into a hell of unsatisfied desire. If your daily business puts a hindrance in your way, be rid of it at all hazards; better be a broken man, than in the full tide of your well-being to find yourself in hell. The old law ran: "Whoever would be rid of his wife must make proper provision for her!" I go a stage further

and say, even if there has been misconduct, you are not to part company with your wives at all; if you do, you are to blame if they go wrong, while the man who marries a woman already divorced commits adultery himself.

"Another illustration: you have all heard the law once given to your fathers; 'You must not commit perjury, but must fulfil your vows as in God's sight.' I tell you, you should not need to swear by this and that at all. Heaven is God's throne, earth His footstool, Jerusalem the city of the greatest of all Kings; your head, for the matter of that, is sacred too—you know you cannot make one hair really white or black. Great words like these are God's gift to you, and are not to be used as makeweights to your light talk. 'Yes, yes'; 'No, no'; there is emphasis enough for you; when you go beyond such simple speech you are giving the devil his chance.

"Once more; you know the words 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth'; your teachers explain them as meaning 'slap for slap, or give as good as you get.' I tell you that to follow the promptings of revenge is to measure yourself with the devil. Whoever slaps you on the right side of the neck, let him do it again if he wants to;<sup>1</sup> if someone takes you into the law-courts, and to pay the cost of the case, you have to forfeit your under-garment, make him a present of your upper-garment as well; if you are pressed to go one mile on Government work, of your own accord accompany the officer who conscripts you the rest of the league.<sup>2</sup> You

<sup>1</sup> That is, "if anyone insults you."

<sup>2</sup> Reading with Codex Bezae "two miles *more*."

are to be at the service of every claimant, and are not to turn churlishly away from anyone who wants to borrow of you.

“Again; you have heard the words of Scripture, “Love your fellow-countrymen,” and know the conclusion your teachers draw; ‘Of course this means that you are to hate all foreigners.’ I tell you, you must love those whom you have learnt to think of as your enemies, and, if they treat you badly, must pray for them. So shall you really be like God your Father; you know He makes His sun shine down on bad and good alike, and sends His rain on all men, whether they obey or disobey His will. Supposing you love those only who love you in return, there is no special merit in that, is there? Quite disreputable people rival you there! Or if you are friends only with the people of your own set, that implies nothing more than average good-nature; the very heathen are equal to that. You are to be God’s men; your love is to be as catholic as His.

*Chapter 6.*—“Be careful not to follow the way of life now laid down for you with one eye upon the effect you produce; if you do so, you take all the virtue out of it from God’s point of view. When you are practising your charities, you are not to obtrude them upon public notice as self-advertising philanthropists do in church and street, to win the applause of the public. Of course, they have something to show for their outlay, but that is all it amounts to. When you are doing a brotherly action, your left hand is not to know what your right hand is about; you are not even to feel virtuous about it. Nor need you concern your-

selves about reward, for there are no secrets to which God is not a party, and He will make it up to you.

“When you pray, you are not to go about it like the people who air their piety; you know how fond they are of engaging in prayer for the edification of on-lookers. They get what they want—a reputation for devotion; but God your Father has nothing to do with this kind of thing. When any one of you is drawn to pray, he will do well to go apart and retire into himself, there holding converse with God who dwells in secret places; his Father, from whom no secrets are hid, will Himself reward him. When you are praying in company with others, do not talk for the sake of talking, as the heathen do in their endless sing-song prayers; leave it to them to think they can impress Heaven by grandiloquence. You must not be like them, for you must remember that your Father knows what you want before you begin to ask. I will give you a model for your public prayers; ‘Our Father God, may all men come to know and revere Thee by the name of Father; let Thy new world come, Thy will be all men’s law, on earth, as in heaven; give us to-day our food for the day that is coming;<sup>1</sup> and release us from our debts, as we too have released our debtors; and bring us not into trial, but rescue us from the devil.’ You see, if you have forgiven your fellow-men their offences against you, your Father will also forgive you your offences against Him; if you will not, neither will He forgive you.

“When you are keeping Lent, do not go about with a sour expression, as do those who fast for appearance’

<sup>1</sup> Or “our needful food.”



sake. You know they murder their natural good looks, that everybody may see what martyrs they are. Of course, they, like the others, get the reputation they desire. When any one of you resolves on a season of abstinence, he should be better groomed and more sociable than usual; the attention of his friends is not to be drawn to his self-denial. His Father who dwells in the hidden life of the heart will see it; his Father who reads all secrets will reward him.

“Do not hoard material possessions; the moth will get into your wardrobe, rust will tarnish your gold, thieves may break into your strong rooms and carry all away. Your provision for future needs is to be laid up in God’s bank; no moth, no rust, with Him; no one can rob you of that treasure. You know a man’s interest is sure to centre round the concerns in which his savings are invested. The eye is the lamp of the soul, and everything in your life depends on the clearness of your vision. Just as when the lamp at home burns badly, the room you live in looks dark and forbidding, but if the light is good, all around it reflects its radiance; so with your social life. If a man looks at others without suspicion or prejudice, his life with his fellows is all sweetness and light; if, on the other hand, his way of thinking about them is churlish and grudging, the world he lives in will look gloomy indeed; he carries the outer darkness about with him! You must make your choice, then, between devotion to God and absorption in the world’s business. No man can bind himself down to the service of more than one master at a time; he will either dislike the

one and love the other, or he will become attached to one and neglect the other.

“So I bid you not to worry about yourselves, so far as food and clothes are concerned. You are far more than the food you eat, your bodies do not depend for their beauty upon the clothes you wear. Study the wild birds—they do not sow or reap, or lay up a store against the winter; yet God your Father looks after them, and you are more precious in His sight than they! Worry never makes your life any longer, does it? What then is the use of worrying about clothes? Learn a lesson from the wild flowers—they do not work for their living or make their own clothes, yet I tell you that Solomon in full dress was not so well clothed as they. If God dresses so well what you call ‘common grass,’ the flowers which grow in the meadow to-day and are cast into the oven to-morrow, surely He will take more pains with you, your poor mistrustful people! You must not let yourselves worry then, or say, ‘How are we going to make ends meet?’ or, ‘What about the clothes I want so badly?’ The thoughts of the worldly revolve round subjects like these; God your Father knows all the things you want! The bringing in of God’s new world, the practice of the way of life prescribed to you by Him, should be your first concern; all other needful things will come your way, if this be so. Live a day at a time, and let to-morrow look after itself. Every day that comes brings its own burden of care, and one day’s trouble at a time is as much as you can manage.

*Chapter 7.* “Do not indulge your critical faculties too freely—you lay yourself open to criticism if you

do; in the long run you will be done by as you did. Why do you take so much notice of the splinter in your brother-man's eye, never stopping to reflect that there is a whole log in your own? Why do you busy yourselves with other men's small faults so much, and forget your own big ones? Self-deluded man, first get rid of the log in your own eye, then you will see straight to pick the splinter out of your brother's eye!

"Your fellowship with Me and each other is your signet-ring,<sup>1</sup> your circlet of pearls; you are not to expose this sacred bond to the tender mercies of cynical outsiders and scandalmongers; if you do, they will trample what should be sacred to you in the dirt, then turn upon you and take away your character too. On the other hand, he who has a precious thing and does not share it with others, commits a sin.<sup>2</sup> Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and the door shall fly open. Everyone who persists in asking gets something; the seeker makes discoveries; to the persevering knocker God's door does open. Yes, you will always get something for the asking, and it will be something good. There is not a man among you who would give his boy a stone when asked for a loaf, or a snake as a substitute for a fish, is there? If then, sinful men like you know what is best to give your children, surely you can trust your Heavenly Father to give good things to those that ask Him! My rule of life is this: you are to treat everyone as you would

<sup>1</sup> Reading, by a slight change in the suggested Aramaic original, "signet-ring" for "holy thing."

<sup>2</sup> Supplied from Tatian's harmony of the Four Gospels—the "Diatessaron."—*The parable of the fig tree is hardly following in what is said in the text.*



like people to treat you; this is the essence of God's revealed law of conduct.

"The door I have opened to you now is narrow, but you must enter it; the road that leads to a wasted life is broad and smooth, and there is always company enough that way; the gate is narrow and the road toilsome which leads to life in God's new world, and few discover where it lies. Do not be misled by men who beckon you another way—they call themselves prophets and come, looking as harmless as sheep—really they are greedy wolves: you can tell what they are only by the mischief they make. You do not gather grapes from a thorn-bush, or figs from the thistle, do you? So every tree whose fruit is wholesome is a good tree to have in your garden; but if its fruit disagrees with you, you had best keep away from it. It is not in nature for fruit that is good to eat to come from a tree that is bad, nor for a poisonous bush to bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is fated to be cut down and burnt. This, then, is the test you are to apply—you can measure their sincerity by the results they achieve. It is not a question of words merely, for not everyone who calls Me 'Lord, Lord' shall have a place in God's new world. Nor is it only a question of the results that men can see, for in the day when I come again many shall say, 'Lord, Lord, have we not been great prophets, saved men from the sway of dark powers of evil, healed them body and soul, and all in your service?' And after all I shall have to tell them publicly, 'You were never Mine; depart from Me; you are rebels, all of you.' All depends upon the reality of men's relations with

*take great  
liberty with  
the sermon*

Me. The man who listens to My words and carries them into action is like a sensible builder, who builds his house upon solid rock. The rainy season comes, the river rises, fierce gusts of wind come sweeping down upon the house, yet it does not fall; its foundation stands secure upon the rock. As for the man, whoever he be, who listens to My words and does not try to live them out, he is like a heedless builder, who builds his house in the valley-sand. The rainy season comes, the river rises, fierce gusts of wind batter the house—it sways—then down it comes in utter ruin.”



## I

### The Age to which Jesus Came

IN no field of research has knowledge grown so rapidly during the last twenty years as in the study of the life and language of the people in the countries which look out upon the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, at the time when the Saviour was born. It is no exaggeration to say that the centuries which preceded and followed the beginning of the Christian era are more accurately known, as well as spiritually more akin to us, than are the sixteenth, seventeenth, or even perhaps the eighteenth centuries in the history of our own country. That is partly because, like our own, it was an age of books, papers, and letters; unlike our own, an age when books and letters were kept. Writing materials were not as scarce and dear as the scholars of the last generation were inclined to think, and as they became later, and everybody wrote or got someone else to write for them. Year by year an abundant stream of documents has been recovered from the sand of Egypt, into which they were once dropped, or unwrapped from her mummies, and the life of the people of Egypt and Syria has written itself out for our edification down to its smallest details, in records which can be trusted, because they were never intended for publication. Of the times of Our Lord His word has

been strangely fulfilled; what was spoken in the ear in the inner chamber has been proclaimed from the house-tops. Not only did the Son of God come "in the fulness of the time"—that is, at the ideal time—but care has been taken that we moderns should have a better chance than any previous generation of Christians has enjoyed, of understanding His Message—because we can know so much more of the world to which it came.

In the Græco-Roman world of those days they had their morning newspapers, their trade-guilds, their laments about the decay of the middle classes and the falling birth-rate, their crowded cities and depopulated countryside, their new rich and war-profiteers, their Socialist agitators, their fully organised credit and banking system. We know how their cheques were made out and how their trade accounts were presented and receipted. "In such matters as transit, public health, police, water-supply, engineering, building and so forth, Rome of the second century left off pretty much where the Victorian age was to resume. The hot-air system which warms the hotels of modern Europe and America was in general use in every comfortable villa of the first century. Education was more general and more accessible to the poor in A.D. 200 than in A.D. 1850." The vices of the age were largely the same as ours, with some significant exceptions; they were luxury, gambling, and the mad rush for wealth along with appalling sexual immorality and a degrading idleness at both ends of the social scale. They had their revues, their star-actors and professional athletes who earned fabulous wages, they had

their comic artists and cartoonists, their horse-races and betting on horses, their public libraries in every moderately large town (given by munificent donors whose names are duly recorded), and their private collections of books, their art-collectors and curio-hunters, while tourists thought less of passing from one end to the other of the Mediterranean than did our great-grandfathers of travelling from London to Edinburgh. There were universities, too, attracting students from all parts of the Roman world, there were itinerant lecturers and street-preachers, while "honorary" degrees were as numerous and often as unmeaning as they are coming to be now. Our modern boxing contests, it is true, only faintly recall their gladiatorial shows, but they minister to the same instinct. It was a restless neurotic age of disillusionment, for peace and prosperity had not brought rest to the souls of men; their virility sapped by a succession of world wars, they had not yet been able to make the best of the great peace.

We must not jump to the conclusion, however, that Christianity has not meant incalculable moral and social progress. Hilarion writes a charming love-letter to his wife, and we are drawn very near to him; he ends his note by charging her, quite as a matter of course, to expose her newly-born child, if it is a girl, and we realise with a start the difference Christ has made. Seneca, one of their loftiest ethical teachers, says quite coolly, "Weak and misshapen infants we drown, for it is not anger, but reason, to separate the useless from the healthy"; even the modern eugenicist is not capable of this. The more usual practice with unwanted children was to leave them for some passer-by to pick up

if he chose and there was a flourishing trade in foundlings, who were kept and trained for immoral purposes. Vices were recognised and indeed fashionable then which are now criminal offences, and then there were the slaves—in Rome alone in 5 B.C. more than half a million of them. Slaves from the West were employed chiefly on the land, those from the East in domestic and skilled labour. They were absolutely at the mercy of their masters, and their number, of course, diminished the demand for free work and lowered wages; this process in turn sent the rural populations into the vices and idleness of the towns. The proletariat of Rome was kept at the expense of the State, and all the cruelties of the emperors were perpetrated at the expense of the old families; the reigning monarch was always popular among the masses and in the provinces. Instead of strikes they had the vastly more dangerous and horribly cruel slave-wars.

The old Greek and Roman religions had quite lost their hold upon educated and uneducated alike, and from the time when Alexander's conquests had opened up the East as far as India to Western travellers and merchants, a steady infiltration of Oriental religions had set in. One after another they had been admitted into Rome and officially recognised there. The mystery religions, an earlier importation from Syria and Egypt, had long had a great vogue in Greece; in this period they became the dominant religions of the civilised world. They all offered some satisfaction to the universal craving for a warmer and more sympathetic faith, appealing to the emotions, they all catered for men's age-long love of secret initiation and



mysterious ritual. For the purposes of our study, their most significant characteristic, common to all of them, is to be found in the fact that they centred upon the idea of a god or hero who died and rose again, thus ministering to the hope of immortality. The new god from the East was depicted in their ceremonial pageantry as set upon and torn to pieces by the representatives of older faiths, only to be born again, as spring comes to life again after the dark, sad months of winter. In a bath of blood, or in secret mystical rites finding their climax in a sacramental meal in which the participants share the eternal life of their god, men can be born again to everlasting youth.

None of these cults, it will have been noticed, had any direct connexion with anything which we should call morality—only with ceremonial purifications—and indeed many of them were bound up with vicious sexual practices of the most demoralising kind. All the same, they were a most potent factor in the preparation of the Western world for the coming of Christianity. Side by side with these popular religions ran the imperial cult imposed upon the East by the West, as the mystery-religions had been taught to the West by the East. It found a ready welcome everywhere except amongst the Jews, because it expressed men's gratitude for the great Roman peace, the immense improvement in order and prosperity that the Empire brought in its train. It was associated in the Oriental mind with the breaking down of national frontiers and the fact, impressed upon men in a hundred and one ways every day of their lives, of a catholic state in being. This prepared the way, along another

channel, for the idea of a universal Kingdom as preached by Jesus. In reconstructions of the life of Christ it has often been forgotten, or at least not sufficiently emphasised, that Syria was then part of the Roman Empire. Though unlike the rest of the world in many ways, some of which I hope to discuss in another chapter, all round Nazareth there ran in full strength the currents of this strange, many-coloured, restless heathen life. We need very badly another life of Christ taking into account our new knowledge of its place in the greater world.



## II

### Town and Country in Syria

GALILEE in Our Lord's day was far less isolated from the greater Roman world than was Jerusalem. Up to this time, indeed until A.D. 40 when the emperor Caligula threatened to set up his statue in the Temple, the imperial government had been signally considerate to the susceptibilities of the Jews of Jerusalem. A special coinage without the head of the reigning emperor was issued for their benefit, though it was stipulated that the taxes should be paid in the recognised Roman money. In the Temple, on the other hand, the imperial coinage was forbidden, and a flourishing trade in money changing, with a commission on the transaction, was carried on in the court of the Gentiles. Moreover, all Jews were exempt from military service because of their Sabbath-law, and their absence from the ceremonies of the imperial religion was tacitly excused everywhere. Julius Cæsar, the founder of the Empire, was specially favourable to them, and they were prominent in the public mourning at the time of his assassination. There was a reaction after this, but it was only under pressure from headquarters that Herod ventured to carry through the census in Judæa at the time when Jesus was born; even then, he modified the usual arrangements, and allowed Jews to re-

turn to their native-town for the enrolment; this was not the general Roman practice. A fence, "the middle-wall of partition" as Paul calls it, had been set up enclosing all the Temple proper for the use of Jews only, no Gentile being permitted to pass this boundary on pain of death, and this exclusion was not merely sanctioned, but enforced, by the Roman authority. Julius Cæsar had, moreover, restored to the Jews many of the towns which Pompey had taken from them, and there justice was administered in the synagogues by Jewish magistrates, only the right to carry out a death-sentence being reserved for the imperial power.

We must distinguish between towns where the Jews held the predominance from those which came under the normal imperial régime. At the time when Jesus was born, Herod represented the Roman power in Judæa; after the short reign of Archelaus, his successor, a Roman governor took his place, while Herod Antipas was charged with the administration of Galilee and Perea, the district which lay between the south end of the lake of Galilee and the Dead Sea on the eastern side of the Jordan. To the east and south-east of the lake lay ten Greek cities in which Greek culture and Greek vices held free sway; they had their amphitheatres within a comparatively short distance of Galilee itself. Cæsarea was not far away to the south-west, and Cæsarea was a Roman city; while due westward over the hills of Upper Galilee you came to the Greek and Roman seaport town Ptolemais, the "far country"—though all too near—to which the prodigal son from many a Jewish home would betake himself. On the lake itself Herod held the fortified city of

Tiberias, from which he kept the plain of Gennesaret almost literally under his eyes, and to the northward was Cæsarea Philippi, with its marble temple set up upon a rock in honour of the emperor. Galilee itself was full of Gentiles and so came to be called "Galilee of the Gentiles"; the towns by the lakeside, nominally Jewish, were crowded with men of all nationalities. This was specially true of Taricheæ and Tiberias; all strict Jews avoided the latter, as Herod had violated an old graveyard to make room for his new city between the mountains and the lake; and so he had been compelled to populate it with the scum of all nations.

The Galileans themselves, and by the Galileans I mean the Jews who had been long settled in Galilee, like the Syrians of later days, were either peasants (fellaheen) or townspeople (belladeen). Nazareth was an unwallèd village, and Jesus belonged to the peasant-class. His parents' home, that is to say, would be a cottage built of mud, in which the family lived by night and day in one room, lit by what is called in the Gospels a "lamp," but was really a bowl of oil on the top of a wooden stand, and warmed in winter by a fire of green wood, the smoke from which could only escape, when the door was closed, by one or two small slits in the wall and roof. Here the family would sleep, each on his own mattress; there was no undressing, but the "beds" were rolled up and put away in a recess during the day. The lamp was kept alight all night for fear of spirits, and in winter, when the weather in the hill-country is often extremely cold, the fire was never allowed to go out. In some of the more ambitious cottages by the lakeside there was probably a roof-

chamber which could accommodate a lodger, and this was perhaps the case with Simon and Andrew's house at Capernaum; but Nazareth would know no such luxuries. We can understand that it was not mere churlishness that made the unneighbourly neighbour in the parable of the friend at midnight so reluctant to get up; he could not get to the cupboard without disturbing the whole family. It is not certain, though it is quite likely, that there was a school at Nazareth; at any rate there was a synagogue, and most of our Lord's knowledge of the Old Testament would be acquired there, for very few peasant families would possess copies of any of the Scriptures. Altogether distinct from the "people of the land," as they were contemptuously called, were the townspeople, who were engaged in various trades, and lived very much more comfortable lives, and the fishermen, who were despised because their work obliged them to go almost naked.

Jesus, then, was by birth and upbringing a member of the poorest and least advanced class of Syrian peasantry; He came from one of those Arab villages into which the Western traveller finds it so difficult to get admittance. Nazareth is not on the main road to the coast, but is in sight of the "way of the sea," if one climbs to the top of the hill on the side of which the village still stands. The "stable" in which He was born would not be an inn-stable, for if "there was no room for Him in the inn," it is certain there would be no room in the inn-stable. In the peasant's house the space near the door where a beast can be tethered is called the stable, and the "manger" is sometimes a rough pit dug out in the mud floor, sometimes a



wooden trough raised a little way from the ground. The Son of God, if He had searched from end to end of the Roman world, could scarcely have stooped lower. All His life He probably wore the peasant dress; we can understand why Simon the Pharisee thought it enough to ask the young countryman to dinner without troubling about the courtesies usual amongst gentle-folk! It is clear from the one authentic story of His boyhood which has come down to us that Jesus found His home-life unsatisfying and was glad to linger in the Temple among His Father's people for a little while. The services in the synagogue had only made Him long to know more of the book of which the Rabbis spoke from Sabbath to Sabbath, and He must have looked forward with intense eagerness to His first visit to Jerusalem, where surely He could find men who could teach Him more. What memories visited Him on the quiet hills of another life with God His Father we do not know, but as the years went by the fact that He was somehow different from the other village people must have been more and more borne in upon Him. He would form His own estimate of the sermons to which He listened, but, whatever He thought of their preaching, He could not but be impressed by the Pharisee, the man to whom at any rate religion was the most important thing in life. Many of the peasant-people were Pharisees, as far as devotion to the law was concerned, though we gather that it was only rarely that any of them aspired to become a Rabbi. Even in Nazareth the power and prestige of the Rabbis must have been one of the outstanding realities of every-day life; they preached in the synagogues, taught

in the schools, and administered justice day by day. In Jewish villages the heads of families acted as magistrates, but Rabbis who lived in the neighbourhood were always called in as assessors, and practically settled the verdict. They were not clergy, for they worked at their trades during the day, and taught in their leisure-hours; but their power was as great as that of any priesthood. Sentences passed at their suggestion were submitted to, though they had no legal right to enforce them. The imperial government interfered as little as possible with local administration, so long as taxes were paid. The Rabbis not only administered the law; they made it, and in the villages their authority was unquestioned. In the next chapter we shall examine a little more closely the strength and the weakness of their position.



### III

## The Jew at Home and Abroad

THROUGH the restless pagan world described in Chapter I there moved the Jew, everywhere to be met with and everywhere at home. Envied for his success in commerce, disliked because of his proud reserve and uncanny prosperity, a reluctant and somewhat supercilious missionary of his faith, he had become the riddle of the Roman world, and his meeting-houses and places of prayer, to be found in every town of any size in some back street or by the riverside, were watched and attended by crowds of devout or curious enquirers. In the universal corruption of manners his home-life was strangely wholesome; he alone of all men kept away from the theatre and the arena, and his devotion to the sabbath-law had already procured for him exemption from military service. His deliberate avoidance of participation in emperor-worship went for long without challenge. Of course there were any number of Jews of another type, but it was the real Jew, the "Pharisee," who was noticed and feared, openly ridiculed and secretly admired. By the time the Fourth Gospel came to be written the Pharisees were known as "the Jews."

When the Gentile, easily impressed by the Jew's piety and puritanism, in a world which knew little of either, sought to discover the secret of his strength and se-

renity, the answer was quickly forthcoming. There it was in black and white, in his mouth and in his heart, for in the book of the law, the substance of which he carried about with him on all his sacred days on brow and wrist, the whole will of God was written. He needed no longer to seek for God or struggle for the attainment of peace here and eternal life hereafter; he had the secret, for on obedience to the revealed will of God, and on that alone, depended the happiness and health of men. His book had already been translated into Greek, the world-language, and was thus at the disposal of the Gentiles. Sensitive spirits like Virgil soon found in verses of Isaiah the best expression of their own dreams of the golden age.

Like Protestants of a later day, the Pharisee had his inspired infallible book; like them, he believed in the right of private judgment within certain well-defined limits. One of these limits consisted in the fact that all exposition must be in line with inspired tradition; on this side he more nearly approaches the Romanist position. But his official interpreters were laymen, not priests; they were the "scribes"—the name "Rabbis" to designate the class is later than the Gospels, though scribes were addressed as "Rabbi." Their authority rested upon the consent of the Church as a whole, not upon ordination. They were, however, mostly recruited from the Rabbinic schools, which consisted of groups of young men gathered round him by a popular Scribe; though they had no rite of priestly ordination, they were in practice co-opted. It has been pointed out in the last chapter that they were law-administrators and law-makers as well as teachers. All their decisions

were professedly deductions from the law of Moses, interpreted according to the precedents set by previous declarations of accredited Rabbis or conferences of Rabbis. Meetings were held periodically, at which agreement upon disputed points was arrived at by a majority vote. They all practised a trade or profession for a living and were supposed to supply instruction gratuitously. When we wonder at the storm raised by the attacks of Jesus upon the scribes we must remember that His was the first onslaught that had been made for many years upon a class round whose prestige and influence the whole fabric of the nation's life had been built. Most, though by no means all, of them belonged to the Pharisaic party; away from Jerusalem, at least, the Pharisaic scribe was all powerful, and his power rested upon a conviction wonderfully impressive in its universality and permanence. It not only survived the attacks of Jesus, but became so much stronger in the centuries that followed, that Pharisaism became all the Judaism that was left when the Temple disappeared. In Jerusalem their strength was so preponderant that they formed the majority of members of the Sanhedrin, in spite of the fact that their bitter opponents, the Sadducees, held the official positions.

Before we can begin to understand the attitude eventually taken up by Jesus toward the Pharisees we must try to do them justice. We owe to them not only the preservation of the whole Old Testament, but also the idea of public worship, not in a central temple but in a local meeting-house—for the "chapel" or "little Bethel" is older than the "church"—and the first suggestion to the world of real democracy, or government

by consent of the governed. We owe to them, too, the idea of compulsory education, free and open to all equally. The Jew is the father of institutions, the expert in the practical organisation of great ideas. These ideas came to him by research in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, not by any process or reasoning, as was the case with the Greek, or by the pressure of practical need, as with the Roman and the Britisher. Services were held in the synagogue twice every Sabbath day, in the morning and in the afternoon, and twice during the week, on Monday and Thursday. Lessons were read according to a fixed lectionary at the morning service, the first from the law, the second from the prophets. It is not certain that the Hebrew original was read at all; later at any rate there was an official Targum, or Aramaic paraphrase, used in Palestine, and perhaps this, not the text of the Old Testament itself, was preached from by Jesus at Nazareth. The Targum of the passage in question reads: "The Spirit of prophecy is upon Me, because it has brought Me up." No wonder the congregation exclaimed "Is not this Joseph's son?"

We owe to the Pharisees, too, the idea of preaching from a text, of ordered and organised exposition. In regard to the sermon, any distinguished stranger might be called upon by the official in charge of the service to deliver an address; anyone, even if he was not of age, could be chosen to read the lessons. This latter fact surely proves fairly conclusive that the original Hebrew, in Our Lord's time a dead language known only to the learned, could not have been read, even though an interpreter was provided. Even the struc-



ture and arrangement of our Church buildings, so far as aisles, porches, and the position of the pulpit are concerned, follow the Pharisaic model. Indeed, our debt to the much-maligned Pharisee is greater than we know.

The essential weakness of Pharisee-religion is to be found in the fact that devotion to a Person, God, had been submerged in devotion to a thing, the book. The book, whatever its source, is written in human words, and words are inevitably ambiguous. It follows that an infallible commentary is required to explain the meaning of the infallible book. The Rabbinic theory was that the "tradition of the elders" did not add anything to the Torah, but only brought out its hidden meaning. The nation had sailed on its voyage with sealed orders; the scribe was entrusted with the task of opening the envelope, and interpreting its contents. In dealing with the multitudinous details of everyday life, he contented himself, it was declared, with drawing inferences from what was already laid down in Torah. A parallel to his treatment of the problems of conduct on the basis of "the law" can be found, Mr. H. G. Wood has suggested, in Baxter's *Christian Directory*, where counsel is given upon the minutest details of conduct by an elaborate system of "particular inferences" from Scripture. But "who shall guard the guardians themselves"? The interpreters themselves need interpreters, until the whole body of doctrine expounded and re-expounded becomes intolerably burdensome, as Jesus declares it to have been in His time. For the book Jesus, in the First and Fourth Gospels alike, substitutes Himself—a stupendous claim! In



the Fourth Gospel He argues that He embodies in His own perfect Sonship the ideal of obedience which was the foundation of Rabbinic religion, in the First He says first "for righteousness' sake," then "for My sake"—the two are assumed to be one without argument! Romanism with its infallible Church, the extremer forms of Protestantism with their infallible book, are thus alike the children of Judaism; indeed within the Church Judaism is always the enemy, because it is the one alternative to spiritual religion for earnest men; it offers a kind of satisfaction to the same instincts and demands the same sacrificial loyalty. It provides a retreat, attractive and accessible, from the fatigue and insecurity of private judgment, from the terrible liberty wherewith Christ has set us free.

Because of its intricacy Pharisaism is also forced not only to explain, but often to explain away the complicated and arduous provisions of its written standards. To explain away is always easier than to explain; thus a system of organised pretence, called casuistry, is soon forthcoming. Life is too short for fulfilment of the law as interpreted by tradition, and so men try, by verbal quibbles and mental tricks, to sophisticate themselves into believing and persuading others that they are fulfilling a law of conduct, which taken literally—and it must be taken literally, or the whole edifice of Pharisaism collapses—is impossible of fulfilment within the limits of human life and powers of endurance. By "hypocrisy" Jesus means every kind of unreality, from conscious play-acting to the most complete self-delusion. The trouble with the most bitter enemies of Jesus was that they had tried so hard

to persuade other people that He cast out demons by the help of Beelzebul that they had succeeded in persuading themselves of the truth of their lie. It is only the simpler forms of self-delusion which meet us in the Sermon on the Mount. Something more is to be said about the early affinities of Jesus with the higher Pharisaism of His time in the next chapter.

## IV

### Jesus and the Pharisees

WE must not forget that the first disciples of Jesus belonged to one section or another of the Pharisees. Zacharias and Elizabeth walked "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly"; in other words, though he was of priestly family, they were Pharisees, as were Simeon and Anna and probably Mary and Joseph. From such little groups of Pharisaic quietists Jesus drew His first adherents in Jerusalem; they were the "Israelites indeed," whom He called away from the shelter of "the figtree" of Judaism to see greater things than the Messiah of their dreams, "the Son of God," "the King of Israel." He did not exaggerate when He called them "the salt of society," "the light of the world," for in dark death-shadowed "Galilee of the Gentiles" they were all the light there was.

It has been implied in the last sentence that the first part of the great Sermon at least should be taken as a deliberate appeal to a distinct group of unofficial Pharisees. They were called the "poor," the "meek of the earth"; their watchword was "righteousness," while "they shall see God" reminds us again of Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and of Philo's explanation of the name "Israel" as meaning "the man who sees

God." By striving to keep themselves pure, they hoped to attain to the beatific vision—to be Israelites indeed, because, like Jacob, the man of peace, they struggle to know His secret name, but, unlike him, are "without guile." The traditional ideal of the Pharisaic party had always been pacifist; their predecessors, the Chasidim, had burnt their fingers badly when, under the later Maccabean kings, they had resorted to force, and they had learnt their lesson. Some of their Rabbis, notably Hillel and the Gamaliel who was Paul's teacher, were very much less severe in their legal decisions than were the Sadducees, and might claim the title of "merciful." The zealots do not appear as a separate organised party till just before the fall of Jerusalem; but it is fairly certain that the tendencies they represented were strongly developed long before that time, and one of the twelve is called by Luke "Simon the zealot." The zealot's watchword might have been "God helps those who help themselves," that of the Pharisees "In God's good time, but certainly not till the chosen people fulfils the law." It is interesting to see that Jesus takes sides on this question with the Pharisees.

We may expound the Beatitudes, then, in this way: "My appeal is to those who are really poor—'poor in spirit'—those who deserve the honourable name of 'poor' in the deeper sense; to mourners—to those who, like their predecessors described by Malachi, 'walk mournfully before the Lord of hosts,' because they feel the time to be out of joint; to the 'meek,' to those who care for 'righteousness,' the life of personal and corporate obedience, to those who practise charitable



judgment, who with single-minded devotion seek the vision of God. Such men and women are already the 'salt of society'; like the town on the hill-top, they are noticed and wondered at by everybody." In every phrase contained in this part of the Sermon Jesus has before Him the kind of people I have been trying to describe. The whole Gentile world was watching the "Israelite indeed," for he was by himself in that busy world; persecuted, disliked, slandered as he was, men knew in their hearts that he was the best and soundest man to be found anywhere in those days.

Little circles of men and women who live to themselves tend to become unduly self-conscious and superior. Either they shrink more and more from contact with the world outside and so hide their light, or else they get into the habit of posing; knowing what is expected of them, they become morbidly conscious that they are being watched and discussed, and learn to look for the applause, or at least the interest of people to whom unusual piety or strictness of life provides a novel sensation. They must learn, says Jesus, that no virtue is of any use, unless it helps "all who are in the house," all, that is, who come within the range of its influence—to believe in God and goodness; but they must also beware of the other and greater danger, that of following the way of life to which they have committed themselves with an eye to human appreciation. When they become uneasily, or perhaps even complacently, conscious of the fact that they are different from others, or begin to be over-aware of their superiority themselves, all the goodness goes out of what they do from God's point of view, and His is



the only verdict that really matters. These are indeed the characteristic defects of Puritan religion, and both tendencies can be traced to the same source, the self-consciousness which breeds shyness or professionalism, which makes men shrink altogether from publicity or court it too eagerly. In Our Lord's recognition of these dangers we can see the beginnings of His alienation from all but a few of the Pharisees, with whom at the outset of His Galilean ministry He declared Himself to have so much in common.

A very marked feature of modern life both inside and outside the Churches is the increase in the number of fellowships, groups of people bound together by a common interest, and developing an organised corporate life separate from those who do not share the quest and the crusade for which they exist. This is all to the good, for it proves that at least some men and women are beginning to care so intensely for their spiritual and social ideals that they feel that they must express their enthusiasm in some new and more emphatic way. Moreover the very idea of fellowship is being born again in our days, and we are finding out afresh all that we can do for one another and for ourselves by thinking and working and praying together. But if we begin to dwell more and more upon the comparative coldness and indifference of those who remain outside our fellowship, if we let ourselves grow over-critical or contemptuous of those to whom our way of thinking does not appeal, the poison of that Pharisaism which Jesus so sternly denounced has already worked its way into our fellowship; it has become a mere party, the kind of religious club with

which Jesus would have nothing to do. We are no use at all unless whatever we have learnt is put at the disposal of *all* who are in the house, without parade of the fact that we have discovered it, or that they have not; unless we are able to work it out in deeds so obviously right and Christian that those who see them may be impressed not so much by the fact that we have done them as by the faith and life that made them possible. Unless our attitude is really right to our fellow-Christians who do not yet see eye to eye with us, our quest for the secret of power will be in vain; if we bring our gift to the altar, and there remember that they can allege against us any impatience or aloofness or scorn, our first act of consecration to the new life must be to go and make friends with our reactionary brother, then come and offer the gift. There is a way of bearing witness to blessing received in a fellowship which other Christians have not cared to enter which only provokes and irritates those who have not shared our experience. We are not to speak as though the new truth or the enhanced power was *our* discovery or the patent of our group. We are, says Jesus, to find out some way of expressing what has been given to us that will call attention not to the fact that everybody else does not do the same, but that this is just the natural thing which every Christian can do, whether he belongs to our special group or not. Further consideration of the other danger—that of posing for effect or professionalism—must be left to a later chapter.

## V

### The Breach with the Pharisees

WE have seen that Jesus had much in common with the Pharisees as He entered upon His work, and that in the first detailed account of His programme He appealed to the rank and file of that party. They held the doctrine of the Fatherly providence of God as He did, though He gave to the idea a far wider range. One of their teachers said, "Not a bird perishes apart from Heaven," and "There is no forgetfulness before the Throne of His Majesty." They also believed in the freedom of the will and in the Resurrection. All the petitions of the Lord's Prayer find a parallel somewhere in the maze of the rabbinic writings. Their whole theory of life was that of the 119th Psalm; the law, they would tell us, is no burden, for the greater the number of commandments, the less room there is for misunderstanding of the Father's will, in perfect obedience to which lies the secret of peace. They looked, as Jesus did, for a kingdom of righteousness, in which God's will should be done on earth, as in Heaven. Into the service of His campaign He called all their great watchwords, "the poor," "the meek," "righteousness," "peace-makers," "the Kingdom," "the Heavenly Father." Even His humanitarian teaching about Sabbath observance finds its echo in the saying

reported from Hillel: "To you is the Sabbath given over, and you are not given over to the Sabbath." There were, we may be sure, many scribes who, like the eager and responsive questioner in Mark xii, were "not far from the Kingdom of God." The "golden rule" itself occurs in rabbinic writings, as in the book of Tobit, in the form, "What you would *not* have other men do to you, do *not* to others."

Of course, points of difference are at least equally numerous, and perhaps more important—but the great difference is one of atmosphere, of spirit. This may be illustrated by the help of a well-known rabbinic parable about labourers in a vineyard. One young workman works only for one hour, and yet is paid, like those who came in last in corresponding parable of Jesus, as much as the others, who have borne the burden and heat of the day. The other labourers grumble, and are told that the man they are jealous of has done as much work in one hour as they in the whole day; the story finds its *raison d'être* in the premature death of a promising young Rabbi. The whole point of the parable in the Gospel is that the men who worked but one hour did not *earn* their pay; they entered the vineyard without stopping to ask questions about wages at all, perhaps because they were so much surprised that they of all people in the world should be wanted, that they were inside the gate and at work before they knew what they were doing. All over the writings of the Rabbis lies the trail of the bargaining spirit; so much obedience, so much happiness here, so much reward hereafter.

It may be said that Jesus also spoke of reward con-



tinually. He used such phrases as "treasure in heaven" and "what reward have ye?" The difference is suggested by the parable just quoted; the reward He offers does not consist in being singled out from less meritorious performers for special honour, rather in being admitted along with other faithful people into the fellowship of His presence and His triumph, to a common entrance into the "joy of the Lord." There are sayings, it is true, which suggest special reward for specially selected people; the disciples are to "sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," and even in the Kingdom of Heaven there are to be greatest and least; one slave is to have five cities, another only two. In any conceivable world-order responsible positions of trust and authority must be given to those best fitted to undertake them; and in these cases the reward, if reward it really is, is out of all proportion to any possible merit. When we have done our best we are to say: "We are slaves; we have only done our duty." The idea of keeping a kind of credit account with God is simply laughed out of court. Sometimes the Rabbis suggest the same thing, only they go further; one of them, for example, said, "The reward of a precept is a precept"—but this is too cold a rule for men to live by. Jesus knew that we need to work for something else than the mere joy of working. *We* are to say "We are slaves," for to be slaves in such a service is reward enough to go on with at any rate. *He* says "You are My friends," because He knows that only a real partnership with such a Master as He can satisfy those deeper instincts which called us into His service. It was not when those first followers of His had fin-



ished their task that He called them His "friends"; they became for ever His friends not because they put themselves at His disposal, but because He put Himself altogether at theirs. Any thought of services rendered is swept away when the Master dies for His servants.

We are now in a position to define more exactly in what the difference between Jesus and the Pharisees consisted. The weakness of all Pharisaic religion lies in the fact that it is founded not upon love—and by love is here meant loyal devotion to a person—but upon duty, or devotion to an idea. The Pharisee might reply to this assertion by saying that his ideal was devotion to a person, and his answer would cover a real truth. All the same, there is an unmistakable difference of emphasis, and in these matters emphasis counts for a great deal. For practical purposes, to the Pharisee the one supreme and final revelation of God was in a book; his devotion to the book separated him from all the nations of the earth, and also from "the people of the land," the uninstructed careless crowds of his own countrymen. For him the religious life depended upon knowledge, for if right conduct can only come by conscious obedience, and the commands of God are many and intricate, how can the unlettered or stupid man obey what he does not know or cannot understand? With the best will in the world, the man who had not leisure or capacity to become learned in the law could never be a saint. It is true that the Rabbis said a good deal about the relative importance of "light" and "weighty" commands, but in theory all precepts were alike, for all alike expressed the will of

God. They also said that the whole of the Torah could be summed up in the two greatest of them all, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . ." and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour"; but if we asked them how you were to love God they could only say "By fulfilling His commands," and that brings us back, of course, to our starting-point.

Thus it was that the peasant-class in which Jesus was born came to be regarded as negligible for the purposes of religion. They were taught as much as they could take in, in school and synagogue, but they were despised and given to understand that they need not aspire to honour in the Church. The strict Pharisee would not eat with them, any more than he would with publicans or Gentiles, lest he should be betrayed into forgetting any one of the many regulations governing his diet and his manners at table. Self-conscious experts are tiresome people at any time, but specialists in religion, men who profess to exude inspired wisdom, soon become snobs of the most obnoxious kind. With all their affectation of humility, their deferential quotation of the dicta of older authorities upon disputed points in exposition, the scribes must have strutted about with the consciousness that they were the people who knew all that was best worth knowing. Some of them might deserve to be called "the salt of society"; as a class they had grown heavy and sour and useless, because they felt themselves to be indispensable. Into their deferential and comfortable world Jesus broke with His unanswerable common-sense, and they knew by instinct that until this disturbing presence was removed they could never get back to the kind of life,

so flattering to their self-importance, that had once taken up all their thoughts. If the whole will of God is written in a book, you can become an expert, for it is only a matter of brains, time, and trouble; to have the brains and the time and to be willing to take the trouble marks you out at once from those who are less fortunate or industrious. But if religion is concerned with love to a person, there is no limit to duty, and there can be no question of merit. Where we truly love, the idea of merit never comes into our thoughts at all, though the idea of reward, the return and exchange of love, does. Still we never think that we have deserved the return, we only know that we can never be content without it. Jesus speaks often of a reward, never of deserving it.

If the Pharisee had no dealings with "the people of the land" except from the pulpit on the Sabbath, still less could he consort with publicans and Gentiles; he classed the two together. If the publican or the harlot repented, forgiveness was promised. But the sinner must come to the saint, the saint could not go after the sinner; his virtue was too hardly won and too easily lost to be risked in dubious company. We do not always realise how utterly radical Jesus was; Pharisaic religion is based upon a series of distinctions, all of which He undermined. A chosen people, an infallible book, one sacred day, one sex specially qualified for sacramental functions, one spiritual aristocracy, these walls of partition all went down before Him. These ideas are rife in the Church still, for Judaism springs eternal in the human breast. All the real heresies as well as all the abuses that have obstructed the progress

of the Kingdom through the centuries can indeed be traced back to those elements in human nature which Pharisaism represents. Romanism, Puritanism of the hard kind, Spiritualism, the narrow orthodoxy of some and the self-confident theorising of others in the modern Church, along with Islam outside, are all directly or indirectly descended from rabbinical Pharisaism; Judaism is *the* enemy, because it is always the second best, for religiously-inclined people the one alternative to Christianity.



## VI

### The Beatitudes

THE word "blessed" has little or no meaning for us, because it has become a technical term of the religious life. One of our greatest handicaps in the interpretation of the New Testament lies in the fact that we have not yet discovered how to express the realities of the spiritual life in the realistic language of the people. We have to deal with a generation that has never learnt to attach a definite meaning to historic Christian phrases; one of our most urgent tasks is that of translation, or rather paraphrase, for word-by-word translation is impossible, if it is to be really translation. "Happy" will not do as a substitute for "blessed," for to men of our age "happiness" means something quite different from the "blessedness" of which Jesus spoke. What is apparently meant is "to be congratulated upon their prospects"; the men and women described in the sentences which begin with this word are likely candidates for the Kingdom, as the "rich" and "well-fed," "the strong, the easy, and the glad" are not.

Perhaps enough has been said in a previous chapter as to the nature of this first constituency of Jesus; only a little more detailed exposition is here necessary. They were lowly folk who felt themselves out of touch with the restless life about them. Their tendency was

to shut themselves up with their dreams of the "Kingdom," to live among like-minded associates, to let the foolish world, "the giddy multitude," as our fathers used to say in their prayers, go by. The word "meek" is specially difficult to render in modern speech, for it has a wealth of meaning. In the Old Testament it seems to mean "humble"; in the New it is applied to Himself by Jesus in close connexion with another phrase translated in our versions "lowly in heart," but perhaps more adequately rendered "of homely mind," "easy to get on with." In the Bible when two epithets are joined by "and," it will be found very often that each explains the other. "Unassuming" or "ready to make allowances" gives us one side of the meaning of the word, "patiently persistent" the other. It should be noticed that they are "to inherit the earth"; that is, to fall heirs to the lordship of human life. They are men who, with great ends in view, are willing to give way and make allowances in matters of smaller moment; they have that rare faculty, the ability to distinguish trifles from what is of serious importance. All quarrelsome people justify themselves on the ground that the thing is a question of principle with them; the meek man knows by instinct where he must fight and where he can safely yield ground. It may be claimed that "meekness" in this sense of the word has proved the secret of such success as we have had as an imperial power, as it certainly helped the Roman empire to hold the nations of the world together for so many centuries. Where we have known how to give way, as in South Africa, we have built up our empire; where we have been unyielding, as in the war with our

American colonies in the eighteenth century, and in so much of our dealings with Ireland in this, we have failed disastrously.

"Righteousness" in the next verse means conformity to the will of God in social as well as in individual life, and "merciful" carries the sense of "brotherly" rather than "pitiful." The Gospel idea of "mercy" is not that of the compassionate condescension of a superior to one beneath him, rather than of *esprit de corps*, of the spirit which Sir G. A. Smith calls "leal love." The phrase "the pure in heart" just hints a contrast with the stress upon ceremonial purity in the religious life of all Pharisees; the side reference to the story of Jacob, the man who was first called "Israel," because he saw God face to face, has been dealt with already. "Heart," it should be observed, should be translated "mind" in our current speech; the "pure in heart" not only live and look for the vision of God, but are so much absorbed in their quest that they desire nothing else, they are set free from the hindrance of competing motives, unlike the rest of us, who want so many things at the same time that we never really get anything. The word "peace-makers," as I have suggested already, contains an allusion to the pacifist tendencies of the Pharisees, but it also has a deeper meaning; the "peacemakers" are those who seek to call their fellows away from the distraction of the desires which divide them and set them against one another, that they may be free from the crusade which unites us all. It is interesting to notice that "the Peace" was one of the common half-superstitious evasions of the name of God; a "son of peace" (compare

the phrase in Luke x, 6) would be a "son of God," and so he is, says Jesus, in more senses than one. By and by the peacemakers will be recognised for what they are, God's men in the world, as reconciling is God's work; He "was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

Each of the Beatitudes, it will be seen, leads us one step higher on the steep road of spiritual attainment. We begin with humility and a "divine discontent," we pass on to forbearance with others coupled with concentrated aspiration after an ideal always clearly visualised and always beyond us. From the clear view of the ideal and the concentration of soul-hunger upon it, springs a new consciousness of brotherhood with all men—for the range of spiritual vision broadens as we ascend. The summit once reached in the sight of God's face, our work in life lies clear before us; it is to do God's work of reconciling men to Him, and each other, and the consequence is persecution, but a persecution which should be our delight because it is borne for the sake of an ideal now realised in Christ, and is our guarantee of a place in the apostolic succession of persecuted people. Another way of taking the Beatitudes is equally illuminating. They run in pairs, the first member of each pair describing a virtue from the point of view of the secret life of the soul with God, the second its expression in social relations. This is true of all except the third ("Blessed are the meek") and the last ("the persecuted"); these summarise what has gone before. If you are lowly-minded and ill at ease in the world, you will be ready to make allowances and will be content to wait. If you have attained



to the vision of God and (consequently) live to make peace, you will be persecuted. Reading the rest of the Beatitudes in this way, we see at once that the discontent praised in the second is the outward side of the poverty of spirit, the consciousness of weakness in the spiritual life, which is the subject of the first. The sense of brotherhood is the working out of the concentrated aspiration after the new world seen from afar; the desire to call men from issues of less moment to share our experience of God in Jesus comes when we have reached the top of the mountain and look down on the conflict in the plain below. Persecution "for righteousness' sake" is the result of the quest which has thus become a crusade, and is to be exultantly welcomed not as the penalty but as the reward of service. It is doubtful whether the people addressed by Jesus had yet suffered serious persecution for their religion, so He passes quickly from the past to the future, and from the general statement "I congratulate those who have ever been persecuted" to "I congratulate *you*, when men persecute and slander you for *My* sake." Here the personal note comes in with startling suddenness, and we pass from general maxims to a tremendous claim. Loyalty to a cause has now become devotion to a Person.

It will have been noticed that the link which holds the Beatitudes together can be found in the fact that they are all blessings upon a particular kind of discontent. The people described here as likely candidates for the new age are men and women who cherish an ideal perpetually challenged by the world in which they live as well as by some of their own less noble moods.

Such men are all to themselves, the salt of society and the light of the world because they are different. The constant pressure of public opinion, together with those darker moods common to men of a sensitive temperament, is bound to have its effect upon them as the years go by; how serious its depressing influence upon the best of the Pharisees came to be is shown by the books written by such men in the next generation. "Out of all the trees of the earth," complains one of them, "Thou hast chosen Thee one vine . . . out of all the peoples that have become so many hast Thou gotten Thee one people . . . and bestowed upon it Thy law . . . if the world has been created for our sakes, why do we not enter into possession of our world?" Disillusioned and out of love with their times these men soon shut themselves up with their somewhat forlorn and precarious hope. "For the youth of the world is past, and the strength of creation already exhausted . . . and the pitcher is near to the cistern and the ship to the harbour, and the course of the journey to the city, and life to its consummation." They needed the assurance that the true light was already shining, some visible certainty that the world could be redeemed. This new confidence the coming of Jesus was meant to give them; if they could but see it, He was their ideal incarnate. All that they need do, He says, is to add to their creed a glad loyalty to Him and they would enter into "the treasure of an inward Heaven," the "Kingdom that could not be shaken," a sudden realisation of their age-long dream in actual workaday experience. Meanwhile they must strive to make the ideal available for the whole community in which they

lived, no longer keeping their brotherly forbearance and charity to the members of their own group; they must make it tell for all it was worth upon the world about them, for when He came the Kingdom had come with Him into the common life of men; their solitary quest is to become a triumphant crusade.

Nowadays, too, we have our idealists, self-denying and earnest people who stand, in face of endless discouragement, for the Kingdom, though they express their ideas of Utopia in different language; they dream chiefly of social regeneration, but their inspiration is in essence religious. The whole form and pressure of the age is against them, and they tend to become somewhat fretful and petulant. Idealism cannot live without hope, and there can be no real hope outlasting youthful optimism and exuberance without Him who is the Kingdom incarnate. The very power to believe in the possibility of the ideal is being gradually worn away in the minds of many of the best people of to-day, because they have only their own convictions to fall back upon. They are always in the opposition, and seem so often to be on the losing side that they become intolerant and sometimes very bitter. Such intolerance is the one thing most calculated to make an ideal, which would be unpalatable anyhow, quite certain to fail in its appeal; when men can charge us with faults of temper and can call us Pharisees with any degree of truth, we put a weapon into their hands more deadly than any they can forge for themselves. Jesus, who gave Himself to the fellowship of men who did not understand Him and could not share His inner life, yet carried the light unshadowed through the darkness

around and before Him to the conquest of an unbelieving world, because He was and is "the Word made flesh," can teach us how to believe in, to bear with and to love those who are unresponsive to our message.

Something remains to be said about the imagery of these verses. Salt had two chief uses in the domestic life from which Jesus so often took His illustrations. It was first "pure, then peaceable"; in other words, it was employed to keep things from going bad, and as a condiment in cookery. Much of the salt used then, specially that which was brought from the Jordan valley and the Dead Sea, was bituminous and of inferior quality, liable to lose its preserving power, to become heavy and sour. A heretic was described by the Rabbis as one who "cooked his food without salt"; salt in that phrase corresponds to the saving common-sense which keeps men and societies together. In the peasant-home from which Jesus came the dimly-lighted room would only seem home-like when the lamp was brought in. Another memory of His boyhood would be that of the village which had been His home so long perched high on the hill-side, a landmark in all weathers, by which men steered their course over the hills. Like the lamp in the cottage that never quite goes out the night through, like the town on the crest of the hill which serves as a guide to travellers at all seasons of the year, we are to let our light shine out so that men may find it less difficult to believe in God, themselves, and each other because they have crossed our path.



## VII

### The Old Religion and the New

THERE was one fundamental question which any Jewish teacher had to answer ; what was his relation to the old religion? Jesus deals with this delicate subject with complete candour. We must not allow ourselves to be swept by our dislike of some of the forms in which the old religion found expression into disregard of His plain statement. He was "not come," He said, "to destroy the old religion." It was God-given ; not merely its great declarations, but what might seem comparatively unimportant details carry an eternal meaning. No affirmation could have been more satisfactory to His listeners then, scarcely any more embarrassing to many progressive people now. But His explicit pronouncement cannot be explained away, and indeed cannot be attributed to the conservative prejudice of the evangelist, for it is probable that the saying contained in v. 19 was also to be found in the original draft of the Third as well as the First Gospel ; it was removed by the father of all "higher" critics, Marcion. Jesus makes haste to add that His interpretation of the moral law revealed in Scripture is to go far beyond that propounded by their leaders, the Scribes of the Pharisaic party.

We may argue with some force, if we will, that

whatever the intention of Jesus may have been, as a matter of fact the new law has displaced the old; He Himself said that no one can with impunity sew a patch of new cloth on to an old garment. What did Jesus mean by the law? Not everything in the first books of the Bible certainly, for He abrogates some of the provisions of the law of Moses in several cases by implication, in one case at least—that which concerns divorce—in so many words. We need not assume that, because to a Jew of the first century “the law” meant everything in the Pentateuch, it was so for Jesus. Indeed, as we shall see, He contents Himself in the sequel with showing how the five *basal* principles of the law receive a larger interpretation in His programme. The point is that He claims to do what the scribes also sought to accomplish, to “fulfil the law and the prophets,” that is to declare their hidden meaning. If He seems to substitute loyalty to Himself for loyalty to the book, it is not really a substitution, for He is the subject of the book—“Moses wrote of Me.” When the early Christians sought everywhere in the Old Testament for “testimonies” to the Christ, some of their findings may seem to us to be far-fetched and remote from the intent of the original writers, but they were following His lead; they were right in principle, though we may think that they carried the theory to grotesque lengths.

Jesus proceeds to give five examples of His method of treatment, choosing for this purpose the five great principles underlying the law of Moses and interpreting them afresh. The first illustration chosen concerns the principle of the sacredness of human life embodied in

the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." The scribes, following the precedent set in the law, allowed the possibility of justifiable homicide in certain circumstances, and added "But whoever kills must stand his trial." "I go further," says Jesus, "and say, Whoever persists in unreasonable anger"—an anger he cannot justify in the sight of God—"must stand his trial." The words "without a cause," omitted in the Revised Version, should come back into our text, as they have been strongly confirmed by such textual evidence as has come to light since 1881. Jesus is here speaking of our unreasoning antipathies, of our dislike for the people who irritate us merely by going on being themselves. An anger that cannot explain or justify itself is not just the outcome of incompatibility of temperament; it is an offence against personality, for the person to whom we consider ourselves antipathetic has just as much right to be himself as we have; it is an outrage upon the soul, as attempted murder is an outrage upon the body; in God's code of justice these misdemeanours are classed together. "Whoever says to his brother, 'Rach' " (perhaps a snobbish colloquialism applied to the "lower classes") "shall be tried on a charge of blasphemy." Anger is a sin against man primarily, contempt a sin against God. Justifiable contempt is indeed conceivable, but upon the man who shows scorn of his brother lies the onus of proving his case, and the charge is a serious one; he, not the man he chooses to despise, is on his trial. The third word, somewhat tamely translated in our versions "Thou fool," stands for downright abuse, and all abuse is profane. The man who allows anger and contempt to

carry him into personal invective stands self-condemned. God can no more allow such offences against men's kinship to one another and their common relation to Him to go unchallenged than any community can pass over murder.

So far Jesus has been dealing with our feelings for or against one another; now He passes to the other side of the question—our knowledge of their feelings towards us. Throughout the Sermon He tells us in many different ways that our relations with God and one another are interlocked. Here He declares that we cannot find God until we have made an honest effort to come to terms with any "brother" with whom we have, for one reason or another, lost contact. If another man thinks he can charge us with any manifestation of dislike or contempt, with any neglect of his grievance, whether there is anything in his complaint or not, we are not to say scornfully that he has a "bee in his bonnet," but are to make an effort to find common ground with him, to give a courteous hearing to all that he cares to allege against us. Perhaps this is the source of the "seeming unreality of the spiritual life," so characteristic and apparently so incurable a trouble in the modern Church; before we can "get right with God" we must be willing to leave no stone unturned to get right with men. If we want proof that lack of fellowship with those who are about us hinders prayer, we need only to turn to Gethsemane; when Jesus lost us, when all His human relationships seemed to be out of gear, even He found it an agony to pray, though all the fault was on our side, not His. There is something else to be said here, but it will be best to



leave it till we have surveyed the whole of the ground covered by the Sermon; everything in the three chapters leads up by one way or another to the Cross.

In general, Jesus goes on to say, never leave a difference with another man unresolved, when there is the slightest chance of coming to an understanding. To take an extreme case: you find yourself involved in a lawsuit, and are actually on the way to court when you meet your opponent going there too; you ought to be able to discover some way out, while you are walking together the short distance left before you get there. The natural thing for most of us to do, if on that day of all days we saw the man who was causing all the trouble coming up to us, would be to turn down a side-street to avoid him. But obviously this accidental meeting gives us a last chance of avoiding a final breach, and all the vexation of the law's delays. Cut your losses, and make it up somehow; being one of My disciples, you should have friendliness and ingenuity enough to find some human way of approach, some excuse for opening a conversation. Never keep an enemy when you can in honesty make a friend; proverbial philosophy bids us "keep out of the hands of the lawyers; it will pay you in the long run," and Jesus is always on the side of common-sense. But with Him this is the main point; the man who bears ill-will always pays, and to the last penny too; however much he may be in the right when the quarrel begins, his persistence, after there has been offered a chance of settlement, results in the transference of the case to a higher tribunal, to a court in which the party chiefly responsible for its continuance stands in the dock and is

cast into the prison-cell of his own unforgiving rancour. Jesus does not mean, here or elsewhere, that God casts a man into a hell made for him, but that he makes hell for himself; by and by he is locked up with himself for company, he becomes his own chief tormentor. I remember a case which came under my notice early in my ministry, which casts a lurid light on the warning given here. A man left his Church with a grievance; he told me the story in later days, and, so far as I could judge, he had been grievously wronged. For twenty years he sat at home on Sundays wearily going over the points of the dispute. His children went wrong one after the other, his home was broken up, and he came back a man old before his time; he told me that he had paid up to the last penny, and, so far as I could tell from his story, he had been at least more in the right to start with than the other man. We should notice, before we leave this verse, a suggestion which recurs over and over again in the Sermon, that of the exuberant and triumphant friendliness of the true disciple; he can make friends *in record time*. Underlying the passage there is the idea that, if only men can come together as men, not in an official capacity or as representatives of a party, a way of peace is always discoverable, if they use the brains and the natural good humour which God has given them. We have sacrificed human nature to machinery and organisation, with the result that our relations have become so complicated that we cannot really settle anything; the one thing needful is that we should somehow restore the human relation.

## VIII

### Sex-Relations

AT this point Jesus passes from the Sixth to the Seventh commandment, and this provides Him with the second of His illustrations. The underlying principle here is the sacredness of home life and specially of the marriage tie. The old law forbade infringement by either party of the loyalty which makes married life possible; Jesus again lays stress upon the rights of personality. To "look upon" a woman merely as an object of desire is to wrong her, for it is a degradation of her personal worth. She is not an instrument of sex, nor even a potential wife or mother; she is not first of all a woman, but a human soul; sex is secondary, just as nationality is secondary—as Jesus proceeds later on to declare—the primary reality is always humanity and the common human relation to the common Father. Jesus does not brand sexual impulses as wrong in themselves; He does not even say, as mistaken moralists have done, that the procreation of children is the one purpose for which men were made men, and women, women; He was no ascetic, still less was He a eugenicist. What He does assert is that the treatment of any particular woman as if she existed merely for the purposes of sex is a crime against her, even though such an attitude goes no further than a

thought. Sexual intercourse is an outrage if it does not enrich the personal worth to themselves and to each other of both parties, and both parties equally. The whole standpoint of the modern feminist is anticipated here; as on so many subjects, Jesus has left nothing really new to be said. He goes on to turn the great idea the other way round, but in this case He deals with the external side of the question first. To be dominated by a merely animal passion, however natural, does not merely degrade the object of that passion, but is treason to a man's own self; at any cost of self-mortification he must be rid of it. Better keep your soul, even if it means a starved and thwarted physical life; better deny yourself of natural pleasures than with all your bodily powers about you to be plunged into a hell—a hell of your own making—of never-satisfied desire.

Such a sexual relation as has been defined, a relation which gives free play to the personal worth of both parties, subordinating neither to the other, and never prostituting the freedom of the human spirit to sex, an equal partnership which makes passion a sacrament, not an end in itself, is only possible, in life as we know it, in Christian marriage. Jesus evidently does not regard marriage as His great disciple Paul seems sometimes to have regarded it, as a mere restraint to inconvenient but undeniable sexual impulses; rather as in itself a great fulfilment, the perfect life for normal people. In another place in this Gospel, He shows that He was fully aware that the ideal sex-relation is impossible for very many of His disciples, either for physical or social or vocational reasons, and He con-



siders their case with very marked sympathy; it is not the complete life—they are “eunuchs”—but there are great spiritual compensations; they lose much, but their loss is to be made up. Then He faces the burning question of divorce, and here His word is unmistakably clear. It is possible that even the clause which has been interpreted as conveying an exception should read “notwithstanding the word” (in Deut. xxiv. 1) “about misconduct before marriage.” But it should be observed that He is here speaking of marriage between disciples; a large proportion of the marriages now “solemnised”—to use what is perhaps an unhappy expression—in Christian Churches are not Christian in any recognisable sense of the word; it is exceedingly questionable whether we have any right to say in such cases “Whom God hath joined, let not man put asunder,” and we should not seek to impose a law meant to apply to Christian marriage in a contract in which the only power which can make the marriage permanent has never so far as we can tell had a place. The honest thing for the Church to do is, I believe, to refuse to be a party to marriages except between her members, or those at least who are prepared to make an open profession of faith, and then to insist that the contract so entered into is not dissoluble by the default of either party. By so doing we should lose much popularity, but we should gain in self-respect, and—what is more important—we should be in line with the teaching of Jesus in regard to this most difficult of all questions.

The Pharisaic feeling about the sex-relation is utterly alien from that of Jesus; the Puritan is somewhat morbid on this subject, while Jesus is equally

free from prudishness and laxity. Each of these extremes is due to the same tendency, the tendency to treat her sex as the chief fact about a woman; we are far less inclined to think in the same way about a man. Some psychologists are very busy telling us that sex is more central and dominant in a woman than in a man, and indeed it may be so. But Jesus does not simply republish the religion of nature; for all we know, the very fact that one sex has through so many centuries been subordinated to the uses of the other may have caused a change of balance which is not really natural. The fact we have got to face is that, if sex is the sole purpose of woman's existence, most women are in these days doomed to thwarted and unnatural lives. There is no such championship of the right of woman to an equal place in the sun in her own right as that of Jesus, and, if we knew the whole truth, we should see that He is not only nearer the ideal, but also nearer the real facts of the case. For the Christian, at least, the thing that counts is a woman's soul; the salvation of the man who loves her depends *upon his respect* for what is eternal in her.

## IX

### On Truthfulness in Speech

THE third illustration of His meaning given by Jesus is taken from the principle underlying the Third and Ninth commandments—that of the social duty of truthfulness. “Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain” does not refer primarily to reverence, but to veracity, for the Oriental recognises no obligation to truth except when he is on his oath. The Ninth commandment emphasises truth as a duty to one’s neighbour; “speak truth every one with his neighbour, for we are members one of another.” No society can hold together for long, if we never know when to take each other seriously. Under the old law this difficulty was avoided by establishing two standards of truth. In business contracts and covenants of alliance, in statements made in a court of law, special impressiveness was given by the mention of God’s name. When religious opinion became more sensitive about the mention of the name of Jehovah, other phrases, such as “by heaven,” “by earth,” “by my head,” were employed to carry conviction; or the speaker turned towards Jerusalem, the city of the “Shekinah,” by his gesture calling God, who dwelt there, to witness to the truth of his assertions. The consequence was that no one attached any importance

to any statement unaccompanied by an oath at all. Moreover the phrases used in oaths became just catch-words, as the Bible used in a modern law-court comes to be regarded as a mere convenience; men came to employ noble words as trade-tokens. "Heaven, earth, are great words," says Philo, the Jewish philosopher, "and are therefore suitable for solemn occasions." But words are not ennobled when they are made to serve a purpose for which they were never meant. Jesus had a strong sense of the dignity of speech; but He turns the matter the other way round. Words are not mere counters, but are themselves part of the reality of the sacred things for which they stand. "Heaven is God's throne, earth the scene of His intercourse with men, Jerusalem the city of the greatest of all kings," sacred to Jews, but how much more to Christians! "Your head, for the matter of that, is sacred, too," for your bodies are more than garments, to be cast off and forgotten when outworn; every smallest detail of their fabric has a meaning for God, for He has fashioned them to express His idea of you—"in Thy book are all my members written." Even the words which have become attached to these sacred things are not mere labels; they also are part of our heritage, and must not be degraded to serve as makeweights in the business of buying and selling, in the thrust and parry of law-court pleading.

Of course, every group of men and women with a separate life of its own needs a special language, and slang may be defended as a necessity. But we should not degrade good old words; rather, if we must make what Swift calls "a little language," to express



ideas peculiar to our own circle, we should invent new words, which will pass into deserved oblivion when the group breaks up. The speech of our fathers is a sacred trust, and we must see to it that we pass it on to our children unspoiled for the great uses of love and life and death. Language changes and should change as fresh experience demands fresh expression; but as writers and talkers we must take care that it becomes more worthy, as well as more expressive, for we all have a hand in its making.

But what is truth after all? To this question, which meets us as we pass from the manner to the matter of human speech, Jesus again answers quite clearly. For us, with our fragmentary and uncertain knowledge of ourselves and the world we live in, "truth" may be defined as sincerity. We are to say what we mean, we must measure the strength of our words by the known strength of our convictions. But because we know very little about ourselves except the fact that our moods and opinions are for ever changing, we shall do well to say less than we think we mean, to err on the side of understatement rather than on that of exaggeration.

That the warning against exaggeration, the use of strong words, words with blood and passion in them, to express hackneyed or trivial emotions or mere passing sentiments, has to do with a matter of real social urgency is proved by the deplorable results of war-time propaganda. We have become accustomed to the idea of talking or writing with a purpose, of working up excitement for an immediate effect. When it becomes a matter of policy or part of the duties of one's

profession to affect strong emotion, the poison of unreality, the leaven of hypocrisy, has found its way into our thinking. When the enemies of Jesus said He cast out the demons by Beelzebul the tragedy of their condition was that they had repeated the slander or at least meditated it so long that they more than half believed it. But the effect of the propaganda habit upon the mind of the public which only reads and listens is still more disastrous. Men are so much used to journalistic and platform hysterics, to the loud headline and partisan pleading, that it is almost impossible to rouse them when there is a real need for deep emotion and instant action. Many of us feel that our chief difficulty in these days does not lie in any reluctance to pass a Christian judgment upon public issues; rather in our ignorance of the actual facts. If we could only be sure of the truth, we should know what to think and do; but can we be sure? That public opinion seems to be past feeling on great moral questions is largely the result of the constant over-stimulation of the faculty of emotional response. The time is surely coming when there will be a reaction to simplicity of speech; even now, amid all the special pleading, a man with a straightforward message delivered in plain speech is sure of a hearing, if only because he is so different from the others.

This saying bears also upon the habit of playful exaggeration in private talk. Jesus was never afraid of hyperbole, but His exaggerations, like highly-coloured pictures, are meant to stamp an impression which had to be conveyed somehow to minds duller than His own; they were forcible expressions of truth

which can never be stated too strongly. Our exaggerations more often spring from a perverted sense of humour or looseness of mental fibre. Language is an instrument of self-expression upon which issues of great personal and social importance may at any time come to depend. If we are perpetually playing with truth, we blunt the tool upon the effectiveness of which we must in the last resort rely if we are to be believed, when we need desperately to make ourselves understood, and understood quickly. There are many men who have the utmost difficulty in persuading their friends that for once they really mean what they say. "If you want to say a thing strongly," says Jesus, "say it twice over"; emphasis is to lie in the absence of ambiguity. When you begin to refine and adorn, you weaken the effect of what you say. When you are clever enough to say a thing in such a way as to provide a means of escape, if it suits your convenience later on, just as when you think rather of the effectiveness of your manner than of the strength of your conviction, you are giving the devil his chance to poison the simpleness and truth which is in you with the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

## X

### On True Justice

TRUTH in action is justice, and Jesus proceeds to declare Himself upon this vexed and difficult question. The old rough law of justice is summed up in the words "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth"; much as we may dislike the somewhat brutal crudeness of the phrases used, we must remind ourselves again that Jesus had begun by saying "I am not come to destroy the old religion." The sentence "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" expresses in rough and ready fashion the necessity for the exaction of adequate compensation for serious injury, the only available safeguard for the security of any ordered life. Nothing is said here about compensation for damage to property, for that is settled upon another basis. In the context of this saying Polycarp has the phrase "fist for fist" or "slap for slap"; this phrase should perhaps be restored, as Jesus goes on to talk about slapping—the full text in the Old Testament ends with "bruising for bruising."

The Rabbis interpreted this text as allowing reprisals. Jesus replies that to take the law into your own hands, to act as judge and jury in your own case is not justice, but revenge, its opposite. The old law was enacted to limit and restrain private revenge; punishment is only allowed when carried out by a properly



qualified court. The phrase "official reprisals" is a contradiction in terms, for government has abdicated the functions of government when it allows them; it has become a well-armed and highly-organised bully.

But for most of us, as for the people to whom Jesus was speaking, the real difficulty consists not in discussions as to the necessity of state-justice, but in the hundred and one complexities of our private relationships. Jesus takes three cases: one in which the matter at issue is not serious enough to be taken into the courts; the second in which it has been taken there by the other party, and there has been a miscarriage of justice; the last in which the normal processes of justice have been suspended by what is called by another contradiction in terms, martial law. In each case the "just" thing to do is to restore the right human relationship, the only terms upon which men can live together for long, by such a surrender of personal rights as may balance the exaction, and make the social atmosphere wholesome again. When we consider how many allowances have daily to be made for us by people better than ourselves, if we are to carry on the business of life at all, we realise that the only fair treatment of each other is a generous and forbearing refusal to insist upon our rights in small matters. If we had our rights we should be in some hell of our own making, whereas the love and patience of other people have made a heaven into which none of us could pass on his own merits. "Let sleeping dogs lie" is no bad rule in this department of life as in others.

The blow on the right cheek, or rather the right side of the neck, according to rabbinic phraseology, repre-

sents an insult, equivalent to the more modern and dangerous custom of boxing the ears. The "rapisma," as it was called, was not an injury; it was worse, the Rabbis said, because while an injury hurt your body, the insult of this contemptuous flick with the back or side of the hand outraged your feelings. On the other hand the body feels what it must, the mind only what it chooses to feel; an insult's power to sting depends not upon the wish or the ability of another to hurt you, but upon your willingness to feel hurt. But all justice has in view, not only the restoration of a right human atmosphere in which men can live together with tolerable security, but also the prevention by discouragement of the will to wound the feelings of a brother-man. This can best be brought about by ignoring the insult, for rudeness soon tires if it is not noticed; it lives by seeing itself resented.

Our Lord's second instance deals with what would seem to be a more serious matter. The case has been taken into court, and the Christian has to pay damages, for the verdict has gone against him. He is a poor man involved, let us say, by a rich money-lender, and his situation is one for which there was no redress in the law of the time. So he finds himself in what we should call an intolerably humiliating position, for his only property which can be turned into cash consists of the clothes on his back. He forfeits his under-garment, the absence of which would not be noticed in public. How is he at once to redeem a thoroughly sordid and unjust situation, and at the same time make future oppression impossible? He strips himself of his one remaining garment, and hands it to his victor-

ious opponent as a present! Obviously this is one of the humorous fancies which Jesus relished so much, but it is difficult to see what other course of action the injured party could take which would be half so effective in putting a stop to this kind of thing. The natural human relation of giving and taking is restored, and you cannot go on persecuting, for such people are quite irrepressible.

The third case is also one in which there is no redress for the unoffending sufferer; though his plight is not so desperate as that of the man just described, it is sufficiently grave in a country where armed bands of his own people are about. He is "conscripted" to carry despatches one mile along the Roman road by a peremptory military official. At the end of the mile he has become so friendly with his uncongenial companion that he offers to go two more (the best reading) with him for the pleasure of his company. Such a restoration of what is, after all, the natural human relation when men find themselves walking along a lonely road together is the only possible solvent of the distrust which tyranny breeds and on which it thrives. It is not merely the Christian way; it is the only way out of a situation created by an un-Christian order. Jesus at once shows His disapproval of political anarchy and suggests the best method—if so free and unconsidered a demeanour can be called a method—of mitigating the power of efficient government to override the freedom of the governed; you cannot domineer over such people, for they carry their own large freedom with them.

Jesus sums up His teaching upon justice in the words "Give to every one that asks you." The fair

very right  
with  
interpretation

thing is to treat every one humanly; not always by any means to give money, but at least to give every one a hearing, to show all comers the consideration due to a man. Mercy and justice are not opposites; for men and women like ourselves in a world like this mercy is justice.



## XI

### On Patriotism

THE last of our five examples is that of patriotism, in some ways the most difficult of all to place in the Christian scheme. Jesus deals with it as He has done with the others; He has not come to take it away, but to set it in its proper perspective. The word of Scripture was "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"; that is, on the rabbinic interpretation, "Your country's interests are to be as dear to you as your own." But the scribes went on to say: "If you love your countrymen *more*, it follows that you must love the foreigner *less*." Of course, when once comparisons begin to be made, when Jew and Gentile, Britisher and non-Britisher, are set over against one another, and thought of as irreconcilable opposites, the less love soon passes into positive hatred. If the preachers to whom Jesus had listened so often did not say it in so many words, "Thou shalt hate thine enemy" was the substance of their teaching about the foreigner, who was necessarily an enemy if all who were not "neighbours" were to be regarded as, by comparison, "enemies." Characteristically enough, Jesus answers by appealing not to fine theories, but to obvious fact. The final thing, the one thing from which there is no getting away, is not that we are Jews or Gentiles, British or German, white or

coloured people, but that we are *men*. When for a moment we forget the things we have been taught and are perfectly *natural*, as we become in the presence of the great realities—birth and death and love—we recognise this instinctively, because the bond most deeply embedded in our nature holds us tight to the essential, the only unalterable fact. All unsophisticated people are interested in a baby, be its colour or its parents what they may; at any rate their first question is not "Is it a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative?" Racial, national and political differences are comparatively unreal, for we have the blood of all nations mingled in our veins and all possible varieties of political opinion huddled up somewhere in our very complicated minds. The one thing about us concerning which there can be no mistake and no change in this world or the other is that we are all men, and that rock-bottom truth should be to us, not only once in a while when we are surprised into naturalness, but always, in the last resort the one thing that really counts.

The great problem meets us, however, when we are brought up against situations in which the narrower and normally the more intense loyalty, that of country, appears to compete with the broader and deeper, that of world-brotherhood. Sometimes there is a real and very acute conflict of duties, though not nearly as often as we think. Here again we may help to clear our minds by reference to the actual conditions by which our life is controlled. Do we love the old people at home less when we make a home of our own, or our Church less because we love our country? The objec-

tions often raised to "Love your enemies" as a working principle of life by those who say that we cannot love our enemies as we love our friends, has very little substance in it. The answer is, "No one asked you to do so." So long as we persist in thinking, as the scribes did, that the whole world is divided up into two mutually exclusive groups, "friends" and "enemies," "our people" and "outsiders," we shall of course take sides with the one party against the other, and turn the world, as soon as we conveniently can, into a battlefield. Common-sense should tell us that only on comparatively rare occasions are we called upon to take sides at all. We love our family, our school, the members of our political party, our Church, our country. None of these loyalties need displace the other; each has its claim upon us and asserts itself in its turn. But this is the point: none of them plays its full part in our lives, is as strong or wise or sure as it may be, until all are brought into relation with a loyalty deeper and broader than them all, a devotion that brings into the scope of leal love names which mean more than son or daughter, brother or friend, mother or wife, fellow-countryman or fellow-Christian—God and man.

We have not yet faced up to the fact that there are crises in which the more intense and instinctive love comes into competition with the wider and less easily realised loyalty. When it is a case of love of home pitted against love of country, it is generally true, as the Great War has proved, that, though love of home is not lost or diminished, its claims do give way before the call of the country. Is it safe to say, then, that

where a choice has to be made the narrower devotion must yield to the wider and more exacting demand? Evidently in practice it does so very often in the minds of quite matter-of-fact people. Should the principle hold good all the way? Here we are brought face to face with the supremely difficult question of war. If we have to make the choice between acting as citizens of our country and as citizens of the world, for which loyalty shall we stand? Granted that individual instincts are to give way before those of the home, those of father and mother—where collision comes—before those of wife and children, those of wife and children before those of country, should not the interests of the country be subordinate to those of the world? It seems to the present writer that for the Christian there can be no escape from the position that they should, if there is a real collision. There need be none, but in this badly-managed society of ours there often is. That, in such a case, the interests of the Kingdom must come before those of the narrower patriotism does not necessarily mean that a man should not fight in his country's quarrel; it does mean that the dominating consideration in his decision must not be "my country," but the defence of civilisation against a danger that can be met in no other way, so far as he can see.

The truth is that all our loyalties only fall into their right perspective when God comes into the discussion, and Jesus introduces Him at once. Talk about world-brotherhood tends rapidly to become unreal, because "humanity" is an idea too vast and vague to be imaginatively conceived. Jesus begins with the fatherhood of God, not with the brotherhood of man. God,

What about  
must not  
will?



He says, does not withhold His sunshine and rain from men because He does not approve of their behaviour. He may be angry with them, but there are certain lengths to which He will not go. It seems clear that Jesus did not think of God as directly punishing men at all—at this point He tacitly corrects the Old Testament—rather they punish themselves because they think wrongly about God and therefore wrongly about themselves and each other. They deliver themselves over to Satan, who finds his opportunity in human rashness, ignorance, and obstinacy. Even “eternal punishment,” if eternal punishment there is, is self-inflicted, for Satan only uses the weapons we put into his hands. But whatever we do or suffer, nothing can ever make us anything less than children of our Heavenly Father, nor can we ever become anything more. We are all on the same footing in this life and the next, so far as our essential nature is concerned. Recognition of God as our common Father, with the loyalty proper to that relation, carries with it recognition of all men everywhere and always as our brothers. As the one comes to be instinctive to the man who has learnt his lesson in the face of Jesus Christ, so will the other. The Christian may disagree acutely with his brother, may even have to fight with him; he will never hate him, for he will be restrained under all provocation by his knowledge, as deep as consciousness itself, that, when all is said and done, the other man is his brother. Nor, will he ever despair of him, for between brothers the time can never come when there cannot be a return and a reconciling. May we not venture to say, too, that so long as God is his Father, and he is a child, that

is, so long as a man is a man, there can be no hopelessly lost soul? God is not a man that He should repent, or having gone so far with fatherly love, turn round and try another way.

Perhaps something more should be said about nationality in this connexion, as much of our trouble in the present and very much of our hope for the future is centred round its renaissance the world over. What are we to do with it? If we follow the line of thought suggested by the words that introduce this section of the Sermon, we see that Jesus definitely intended to use all that was best in it. That He kept the fire of love of country burning in His heart, even though He was burdened with the travail of a world's redemption, is clear from the Triumphal Entry, His supreme appeal to His own people. That He chose to become a Jew shows that there was to Him an eternal meaning in national differences. He was proud of His country, too; He said "Salvation comes from the Jews," and what greater claim could a patriot make? But when he came up against the fact that, according to the reasoning of the Rabbis, pro-Jew meant anti-Gentile, there is no mistaking the force of His resistance. It is quite likely that "I was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" should be read, as in the old Syriac version, "I was not sent except after these sheep lost from the house of Israel," and that He gave so much time to Galilee precisely because it was "Galilee of the Gentiles." The fraternising of British and German soldiers at Christmas-time in the first year of the war, the friendly relations set up between the men of the army of occupation and the German village-

people proves that, in normal men, when they are left to themselves, the broader human feeling does run side by side with love of country without either interfering with the other. The problem of racial difference is much more difficult; here there seems to be a natural antipathy between white and coloured people, only transcended by great souls like Abraham Lincoln. At least there is no room in His message for any theory that God has set any barriers between race and race so high that human fellowship is impossible. If closer relations between white and coloured people mean, as they tell us, intermarriage, there is at any rate in the Sermon on the Mount no suggestion that this possibility is precluded.

## XII

### The Perfect Law of Liberty

BEFORE we leave this part of the Sermon something more ought to be said as to the only power that can make possible the kind of broad, single-minded and generous outlook that Jesus has been describing. Whenever we get a little below the surface of His teaching, we discover that our inability to come anywhere near carrying out its ideals is due, not so much to our lack of sufficient piety or saintliness, as to the fact that we are not human enough. Men surround themselves with abstractions like "Capital" and "Labour," "Great Britain" and "Germany," "the yellow peril," and the "balance of power," and forget that the world is really made up not of powers, interests, or parties, but of men, women, and children. Our federations, alliances, combines, trade unions, have become great and tyrannous machines; if only men and masters could meet, not in their official capacity, but on the common platform of their manhood, all sorts of difficult questions might be settled very quickly. The whole fabric of civilisation appears to be on the point of collapse, because there is not enough common human trustfulness and reasonable good nature to carry it along. There are the millions of starving people in



Russia; the grain to feed them is rotting in America, we are told, and the ships to carry the grain are rusting in our ports. But we cannot trust the Russians, and they cannot trust us, so the food that God has given to His children cannot be carried to them, because we have not got human kindness enough to let pity override suspicion. We are "too unhappy to be kind."

We are not likely to get much farther on the lines of self-development. To take only one example from the portrait of the blessed man given by Jesus—that of turning the other cheek—surely it is clear that the action should be carried through as a matter of duty "against the flesh and the blood" is not what is meant. We may, if we will, summon up a grotesque picture of the would-be Christian openly insulted, remembering in the nick of time the verse about non-resistance, and, with an expression of saintly resignation, turning the other cheek! We know by instinct that this is not what Jesus was thinking of. It is the same with the friendliness of the disciple. If his only or his chief motive is a desire to help, he will only frighten the victim of his condescension away; it must be real friendliness, a genuine interest in human nature for its own sake, not for the sake of the cause so much or because he sees a chance of making a convert—he must be *glad* to go the two remaining miles for the pleasure of his uncongenial companion's company. Such triumphant friendliness can only come from exuberant happiness, and that is what most aspirants for the higher life have not got. If we have to *make* ourselves remember that the coloured man is, after all, our

brother, we shall patronise him, and he will know and resent it.

The same observation is true in regard to simplicity in speech; we use language of forced and unnatural violence, because we are trying to persuade ourselves as well as other people; we hide our insecurity in a cloud of words or in exaggerated emphasis. If we were as absolutely certain of our ideal as we should like to think we are, we should be content with the twice-repeated "yes" or "no." But our shyness, our pride, and our mock-modesty alike arise from an inward unrest which we are trying to pretend is not there.

The only cure for all our ills is to fall in love with Jesus, to be set dreaming of and worshipping a Master who can never be altogether appropriated or monopolised, who is just sufficiently outside ourselves to keep us from entangling Him with our self-involved thoughts. When we are swept away from our moorings by some great flood of happiness, we do as a matter of fact in the first glow of our ecstasy carry out some of the commands of Jesus without knowing it. Nobody can insult us, however hard they try; we want to give something away, we feel friendly with all the world. Anyone who saw stolid business men offering each other matches in the train on Armistice day, men who lived in the same street, but who never exchanged more than a curt good morning, chatting together like the dearest of old friends, will know that a great common joy can break down all barriers. Nor is it mere gush; it is the real man breaking through the hardness of suburbanism under the pressure of a noble emotion. The Sermon on the Mount, however simple

and natural it may be made to look, will always remain hopelessly impracticable if we leave out the motive to which Jesus always makes His final appeal, that passionate absorption in Himself which makes us not so much hate ourselves as lose ourselves—to “deny himself” means to act as though self was not there. “He that loveth Me keepeth My commandments.” To begin with self-improvement or even with a longing for a fuller life is to begin at the wrong end. It is true that He said that people who are discontented with themselves and the world about them are likely candidates for the Kingdom; He had to find some common ground with the men and women to whom He made His appeal. But the *new* thing that He came to bring was not a new law or way of life primarily; the new thing was “*for My sake.*” “He that finds himself, discovers the line of thought and life suitable to his own particular temperament, shall waste himself; he that forgets all about himself in love for Me shall discover himself.”

Our love for each other is, of its very nature, exclusive. It has been called selfishness at the first remove. There are no more self-centred people than lovers who are absorbed in one another. But the love of Jesus is something we can never monopolise, something indeed that can only be fully realised in a fellowship. It is a fact of experience that our most satisfying revelations of the presence of Christ have come to us when a group of lovers of their Lord and of each other were seeking it together in each other's company. Those who have been through such an experience can never feel about each other in the old way again. But it is a revelation

of the Risen Lord that we need; as long as Jesus was with them as their peculiar possession, the disciples were divided. They felt that God was at work in Jesus, but He was still altogether outside them—they were just spectators, and were for ever quarreling as to which of them could get most of Him. Then, because they were divided, they failed Him in the hour of His need, and their very failure brought them at last into a fellowship. When their private hopes and prejudices had all been forgotten in their common longing for Him, He came back to them, but only to tell them that He was theirs for ever on condition that they shared Him with all the nations; they were no longer to be *the* disciples of Jesus, for they were to go and make disciples of all men. Up till then they had watched Him at work and seen God at work in Him; now they were to know the fellowship of His Holy Spirit; it was no longer to be “I for you,” but “I *with* you, all of you together, all the days.”

When Jesus has revealed Himself, not before the eyes of any single believer but in the fellowship, when we discover that all kinds of people who had seemed commonplace before can share with us the same experience, human nature becomes radiant with a new glory, because He has revealed Himself in it. As the years go by, we realise that this is the bond which unites us to all men of all nations and classes and temperaments—at any moment we may see Christ in them. Nothing is too good to think of our Heavenly Father, for God is Jesus everywhere; nothing is too good to hope for in each other, because we have seen the Christ come to life again in too many of our fellows to imagine



that anyone is incapable of revealing something new in Him to us. We fall in love with a Jesus, in company with whom we do not have to keep the others out, if we are to make the most of Him, but with One who comes most often and most surely in His little brothers, the very people with whom we should have nothing in common, if it were not for Him.

## XIII

### On the Practice of Charity

FROM consideration of the relation between the old and the new religions Jesus now passes to His discussion of the characteristics of the way of life typical of the new age which He has come to bring in. The thought uppermost in His mind is not now that of the theory of Judaism, but that of the practice of its chief exponents, the Pharisaic scribes. The last part of Matthew v is an expansion of v. 17-19; Chapter vi may be called an exposition of v. 20, which may be paraphrased as follows: "All the same, your practice of the moral law must go far beyond the code of conduct preached by your professional moralists; only a new way of life can qualify you for the new world that has come with Me." At an earlier stage in our exposition, we noticed that people who take their religious life seriously, as the Pharisees did, are likely to be affected harmfully by their separation from the life of the world about them in one of two ways—either they are tempted to defy public opinion, and so to become contemptuous of those whose interests are not theirs, or they get into the habit of expecting the notice of outsiders; they become professionals in religion, and learn half-consciously to pose for effect. The less men are like saints and puritans, the more

they secretly admire them; it is comparatively easy to get a reputation for strictness and devotion in an age of loose living. When you become over-conscious of the fact that you are different from others, and are consequently being watched with curious interest, you begin to be a Pharisee. Instead of making a profession, you become a professional—a very different thing.

To this self-conscious hothouse piety carefully cultivated for exhibition purposes Jesus opposes His ideal, that of a goodness that never thinks about itself. The scribes divided life into three compartments, as far as our relation with persons is concerned. Our duty to our neighbour they summed up in the word "alms-giving," our duty to God in the word "prayer," our duty to ourselves in the word "fasting"; the three taken together constitute "righteousness," the life of perfect obedience. Jesus adopts their classification, and has something to say on each of the three topics. Then He moves on to discuss our relation to material possessions, or things. We ought, however, to bear in mind that "duty" is not the most appropriate word, as it has but a small place in His vocabulary; even its idea only occurs once in the four gospels. The behaviour He describes, as we saw in the last chapter, is not the result of prolonged and laborious striving, but is rather the spontaneous outflow of a hidden life; not so much an attainment as a discovery and a possession. We shall use the clue already in our hands and study His way of life as a reversion to truth and nature away from every kind of affectation and ulterior purpose. That is the link that binds the whole Sermon together;

we are to follow it as far as it will take us, and then face up to the great difficulty which is waiting for us at the end of our quest.

We start again with a fact of experience; it is natural to be kind and to help those who are in distress when we can. If we turn away we know that we are shutting up *our* hearts of compassion, forcibly closing a door that would otherwise open of its own accord. Most people are kinder than they know, for "you may expel nature with a pitchfork, it will yet keep for ever coming back." Even the jingo journalist, who writes about "taking it out of the Huns," can only do so because he has never seen the people he is talking about. Jonah professes to be a tremendous fellow in his indignant hatred of Nineveh, but God has only to leave him alone with a plant for twenty-four hours to catch him stumbling into love. We cannot keep it up; our hatreds have to be nursed to be kept alive at all; we talk ourselves and each other into a heat, but love and kindness come naturally. If then it is perfectly natural to be kind, why expect applause, when for once in a while we are true to our own best instincts? Indeed if we feel a moral glow when we do a really decent thing, we only give ourselves away, for we betray the fact that we do not usually do kind things, that what ought to be taken for granted does not come quite naturally to us. In our early childhood to be kind was perfectly natural, but it is so no longer, and that is why we plume ourselves on belonging to the select and overburdened few who keep all the charities inside and outside the Churches going. That we say so much about what we do or do without, is proof that we are not



doing as much as we ought; if we did, our charity would have come to be so usual as to pass without comment either from ourselves or other people.

When Jesus says "they have their reward" He is using a metaphor from business-life. When an invoice was receipted as "paid with thanks," they wrote at the foot of the bill "I have received"—the same word. The transaction is closed; a reputation for philanthropy has been well and truly earned, and there is an end of the matter. It is not so much the desire for a reward that is wrong, but the desire for *that* reward. Jesus will have nothing to do with the Stoical idea that "virtue is its own reward." We are not to wrap ourselves up in our own self-complacency, or tell ourselves defiantly "They say; do they say? let them say!" We ought to care what others think of us; the Christian does not scorn popularity, or particularly dislike it when it comes; he must be ready to forfeit what he feels to be a good thing for the sake of something which he knows to be better. He is concerned with the results of his action, for beneficence for its own sake has no charms for him. He knows his Father will make it up to him in the only way in which he looks for an immediate return at all, a growing likeness to Himself, "to whom every kindly act of giving and every perfect gift" owes its origin, and at last in the love of his fellows.

## XIV

### On Prayer

JUST as it is natural for the child to be kind, so it is matter-of-course for him to pray, and prayer is just talking to a God who is real and near. All prayer engaged in chiefly for the edification of onlookers or listeners is nothing more than a transaction between the man who prays and the men whom it is supposed to benefit; God has nothing to do with it. Public as well as private prayer has its place in the life of the believer, for prayer has a social as it has also a personal meaning. Jesus deals first with private prayer. *As it is the only place* at which He gives us specific directions for *private* prayer at all, we shall do well to examine His words with special care. There is no need to go into any special room or place set apart for the purpose, for the Heavenly Father is always on the threshold of consciousness; we can always "get through." Sometimes we have gone to a house and the bell—if it rings at all—resounds through the hall, but no one comes. By and by a head is thrust out of an upper window farther along the street, and we are told "They used to live here, but have left long ago." In prayer we may take it for granted that there is always someone at the other end—that is, if we really want to talk to our Father. The "secret chamber" of

which Jesus speaks does not necessarily mean any private room, but the only inviolable sanctuary in the world, the sanctuary of our own soul. In the Old Testament (Isa. xxvi, 20) the people are warned to take cover to escape the coming wrath, but Jesus says our purpose in seeking retirement must not be to avoid God, but to find Him; there is a world of difference between the ideas of God suggested in the two passages. God can be found more readily and surely in the "mind of man" than in "the round ocean and the living air." Just as a child will shut his eyes and pray when he is frightened in the street, and so win courage to run home, or as the soldier finds God instantly amid the roar of guns and the whirl of battle, so anywhere and in any conceivable conjunction of circumstances the Christian can, if he will, make his way home; the "reward" is found often in his own heart, so much easier and braver for his prayer, sometimes in immediate and miraculous deliverance. The faculty which the mystics call "recollection" is one we were all born with; it is an open secret to the man who has never lost, or who has won back again, the childlike spirit.

Should we then cultivate the habit of prayer at set times? There are psychological reasons why we should not forget to look in our Father's direction last thing at night and first thing in the morning, for it is just then, we are told, that our subconscious self is most active; the door of the chamber in our soul, closed all day except in moments of crisis, opens a little way then, and we can give spiritual influence the chance of penetrating our whole being more deeply than when we are living a normal life of wide-awake physical activity.

When we are too tired or sleepy to make a prayer, a look toward God, a thought of Jesus, will do for us what hours of laborious devotion could not do at another time; our very weariness lays the truth of our spirits open to Him, and He will wash our feet. What He has done for us we may not know then, but we shall know afterwards, next day perhaps, when the ordeal we have been long dreading turns out to be less severe than we expected, when the word we have been trying to find for ourselves is given to us when we most desperately want it, when we wake strangely refreshed with the Saviour in our heart. A habit of prayer at special times is by all means to be encouraged, for if we follow the theory that "work is prayer" there is a serious danger of our forgetting to pray at all. On the other hand, when we pray as a duty, just as when we read a "portion" as a duty, not because we find it interesting, but because we have set ourselves to get through so many verses a day, all value goes out of it. We do not think rightly of God if we imagine Him as a jealous taskmaster demanding so much attention; if we feel towards Him as we do towards a father of the right kind, we shall want to talk to Him. For communion with God solitude is often best; if our purpose is to get anything definite done or undone, if there is any problem to be solved, it is always better to get some real friend to pray along with you (Matthew xviii. 19).

The question of public or representative prayer is more difficult. Perhaps Jesus said so little about solitary prayer because He thought that we should not need teaching; public prayer will never seem quite sim-



ple, for there is always a third party present, whose need you cannot interpret exactly for him. The first thing Jesus tells us on this subject is that we are not to talk for the sake of talking, or perhaps (if we admit the still more piquant reading of one famous manuscript) that we are not to “blether”—the word used in the Greek is actually the same, almost letter for letter, as the Anglo-American “blether,” “blather,” or “blither”—we little knew our rough slang had such distinguished authority! The warning is needed, for it is the easiest thing in the world for a practised speaker to make up sentences, because one has to “lead in prayer”; the president of the meeting gives us a few minutes’ warning that he is going to call upon us, and while the hymn is being sung, we are hurriedly putting a few sentences together, so as to be able to get going when the time comes! We sometimes try to compose a good prayer, making it what is generally called “comprehensive,” and forget that prayer is simply talking, alone or in company, to our Father. Nor are we to adopt a kind of language foreign to our usual conversation; for this habit breeds unreality, and makes prayer not prayer at all, but a more or less edifying performance. Queen Victoria disliked Mr. Gladstone because he addressed her as though she were a public meeting; is the Father going to like it any better? It is only the heathen, says Jesus, who expect to make an impression there by their eloquence. We talk to God, not because He likes to be noticed, or needs to be informed of our needs, but because the more we talk about ourselves, as long as we talk quite frankly, the better He is pleased. Some people say, “If the

Father knows what we want before we begin to ask, why pray at all?" Again common-sense comes to our help; any father likes his boy to come and ask him frankly, even though he knows by the way he comes into the room that he is going to ask for something, and he may not intend to give it him; the more ready he is to come, the more straightforwardly he asks, the stronger and the safer are the ties that bind father and son together. Private prayer is only laborious and unreal because so many of us have lost the power to think of God as the little child does, public prayer partly for that reason, and partly because of our lack of sympathetic understanding of the real human needs of the people on whose behalf we are trying to pray. It is all amazingly clear and simple, as Jesus puts it, but it goes down to the roots of that endlessly recurring problem, "the seeming unreality of the spiritual life." We must leave further discussion of this difficulty to a later chapter, when other aspects of the problem will be in view. Meanwhile we who know what it is to give a subscription because we shall be thought mean if we do not or to encourage the others, who know what it means to engage in prayer at a public meeting merely because we are asked, and to fumble our way through a few perfunctory sentences, stand condemned not only by the teaching of Jesus, but by our own lost simplicity of heart, the unquestioning acceptance of the Kingdom of God of which we were capable in our comparatively unspoilt days.

## XV

### The Lord's Prayer

JESUS goes on to give us a pattern for our public prayer. Every petition finds a parallel somewhere in rabbinic writings, but never before had these great sentences been gathered together into one short liturgy. Differences in the Revised Version of Luke's Gospel are accounted for by the fact that Luke's rendering ("Father, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come; give us day by day our bread for the coming day; and forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who is in debt to us; and lead us not into trial") is in prose, whereas Matthew's is in liturgical and rhythmical form. "Father" and "Our Father" would both be "Abba" in the Aramaic original; "which art in Hevean" is a Jewish evasion, for reasons of reverence, of the name of Jehovah.

The first necessity, if the Christian life is to become the way of all God's children, is that men should come to think of God as their Father in the sense in which Jesus used the word. The unhappy fact is that to many of them, now as then, "Father" cannot mean what it meant to Jesus; they never "knew a father's pity." The keynote of the prayer is to be found in the words "*Our Father*," and we are bidden to pray that the name "*Our Father*" may come to stand to all the

children for all that is most sacred, for all that they had ever associated with the idea of God; that His power, His holiness, the attributes which they have learnt to think of as peculiarly His, should be taken up into the idea of His perfect fatherhood. We are not to say, at least when we pray together, "My Father," for the Christian does not desire, like the mystic, any privileged or merely individual communion with God.

Each petition is contained in the one before it; the new world in which God is King will come when all men think of God as "Father" in the sense in which Jesus used the word. "Thy will be done, on earth as in Heaven" is not in Luke, and is probably an explanation supplied by the author of our Gospel himself, but taken from that other "Lord's prayer" in Gethsemane, of the meaning of "Thy Kingdom come." The Kingship and the Fatherhood of God are not two different conceptions, for God can never rule except by consent of His subjects; the only distinction is one of approach. We think of God as "Father" in view of what we receive from Him, as "King" in view of the service we can render to Him. The "Kingdom" is the "Fatherhood" organised; a strain of thought now comes into the prayer which must be steadily kept in mind all the way through. Each of the prayers which follow suggest lines of social service, as well as of aspiration and intercession. The word translated "daily" has been the subject of almost endless discussion, and I am not able to choose confidently between the renderings "for the coming day" and "needful." In favour of the first translation are most philological



considerations; on behalf of the second many rabbinic parallels can be urged. There can be little doubt that there is a reference implied here to the daily provision of "manna." The idea of living one day at a time played a great part in the thought of Jesus about trust in the Heavenly Father, and is brought out again and again in the First Gospel. At the end of this chapter He bids us take our troubles by daily instalments; here He bids us pray that our strength to bear them may be ministered to us in daily portions; "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." There is no need, with Origen and other Fathers of the Church, to spiritualise "daily" bread into "heavenly" bread, for all kinds of necessary supports are included in this great phrase; friendship, replenishment of our stock of ideas, the renewal of the freshness of our imagination, art, poetry, and music as well as provision for the preaching of the gospel and the ministration of the means of grace, are all part of our needful daily bread. It would be easy to show that such ideas as the "right to work" and to be paid a living wage, free education, a reasonable observance of Sunday, and world-evangelisation, are all contained in this one petition. Nor have we any right whatever to pray for the daily bread ourselves, while we do not co-operate with God in the feeding of His other children. God feeds His children, not by ravens, but by the help of the others; there is food enough in the world for all, but Russians are starving in millions, because their brothers will not help the Father to carry the food He has given to them. It is not enough to *pray* for the hungry, to say "God bless you; be ye warmed and fed"; we must lend a hand in the answer-

ing of our own prayers. The Father works through the family, and every human family is based on a sacramental fellowship of giving and taking. Lest we should think that to give is a favour and to receive a humiliation, He has identified Himself not only with him who gives, but also with those who can only receive: "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of these very little brothers of Mine, you have done it unto Me"—"Give Me a drink" He said to a despised woman, to whom no one cared to be obliged, then "You should have asked of Me," as I was not too proud to ask from you, "and I would have given you living water." "If I was hungry, would I tell you?" the self-sufficient God of the Old Testament declares. "I was hungry, and you fed Me," says the God of the New, who, though He was rich, the giver of all, yet for our sakes became poor, not too proud to take from anyone who would give Him a meal, eating the food of the Pharisees who patronised Him, a very Lazarus glad of the scraps from the rich man's table! What a scourge for the pride of those of us who do not care to be obliged to anybody!

In the next clause Jesus is again echoing sayings of the Jewish fathers, but He makes the forgiveness of sins directly dependent upon our forgiveness of each other. "Forgive thy neighbour his offences against thee," says Jesus the son of Sirach, "so shall thy sins be forgiven when thou prayest." The greater Jesus says outright that our sins will not be forgiven unless we forgive. Perhaps we ought to say to men first, not "get right with God," but "get right with men." Here is the reason for the vagueness and uncertainty of our

spiritual experience; we cannot find God, we cannot worship or pray to Him until we have made an honest attempt to get right with our brother. There is a great difficulty peeping out at us again here, but we must leave it till we have covered all the ground. Meanwhile, we cannot fail to see that Jesus leaves us no escape; it is simply not true to say that we cannot forgive. If we say that we can forgive, but cannot forget, the truth is that we have not forgiven. We *can* forget by habitually turning our mind to other things, by making ourselves remember that we are hopelessly in debt to Him, and that our little debts to one another are as nothing in face of our overwhelming obligation to Him.

"Deliver us from the evil one," like "Thy will be done," is not in Luke; it is again a quotation from a prayer of Jesus, this time in the Fourth Gospel: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest deliver them from the evil one in the world." The Rabbis help us here very greatly: one of them said that David fell into sin with Bathsheba because he said presumptuously "Search me and prove me"; he had no business to declare himself ready to pass any test. The word of Jesus in Gethsemane helps us still more: "Pray," He said to His disciples, "that you enter not into trial." They are to pray that they may not be caught in the backwash of the crisis which the Lord Himself was facing then; He was anxious that they should not be tested too severely, for He knew better than they how unfit they were. As the Christian begins every day, he is not to feel himself ready for anything that may come along,

but weak and unsure of himself; he is to pray that he may not be subject to too much pressure to-day. Obviously Temperance Reform and our campaigns for social purity find their truest vindication here; we must help to guard the little ones from temptation, for the fellow-feeling of our own weakness should make us pitiful—"watching yourself anxiously, lest you also be tempted." To say that temptation is a *good* thing is to make a suggestion utterly alien from the thought of Jesus.



## XVI

### On Self-discipline

JESUS does not dwell upon the subject of "fasting" at great length, perhaps because He did not attach so much importance to abstinence as to active benevolence and prayer. The practice of self-discipline is never inculcated as a duty, but regarded, like prayer and almsgiving, as a spontaneous expression of the hidden life of the heart. Indeed, the desire to be fit and healthy is as perfectly natural to the schoolboy as prayer is to the little child; he thinks it no hardship to train in order to qualify for the school football team, and training always means doing without. Jesus says "when you fast," taking it for granted that we shall see the need of exercising ourselves in self-control.

But Christian fasting will never be primarily ascetic, never fasting for the sake of fasting. When Jesus fasted during His temptation in the wilderness, it was probably only because none of His accustomed food was ready to hand; the meaning of Matthew's "when He had fasted" would be covered, if we think of a meagre and casual diet, like John the Baptist's. He did not, it appears, fast deliberately, but went away for quiet thought into a region where going short of food was inevitable unless special provision was made. The Spirit urged Him to go there, and He knew that

the Father could keep Him alive without food if He chose.

That there is a kind of competition between bodily and spiritual fitness is clear from the fact that the constructive energies of the spirit are often most active when the body is weary and restless; a sleepless, uneasy night has, in the experience of some of us, more than once been the occasion of real and lasting illumination. This is probably the secret of the asceticism of the saints, but perhaps the truth is that there is something morbid about a self-conscious development either of body or soul. From such excess the teaching and practice of Jesus is entirely free. Our Lord does say, it is true, that where there is serious danger of competition, the soul must be the first consideration. The words which convey this warning, in their fullest form (Mk. ix. 43 ff.) may be paraphrased: "If your daily business is your hindrance ('your hand' stands for the work you are doing every day, the activity which has become second nature) cut yourself away from it, no matter what it costs; better be a broken bankrupt man and keep your soul alive, than in the full tide of your well-being be flung on the rubbish-heap where the fire never dies down. And if your habits ('your foot' stands for the tricks and mannerisms which have become second nature) are your hindrance, break away from them at all costs; better limp the rest of your days away, better live a maimed and thwarted life, than drift along with smoothness and ease the primrose path to the everlasting fire. And if worldly ambitions or besetting passions are your hindrance, tear them out of your heart; better live what the world calls a narrow

one-eyed life than, knowing good and evil, the widest-awake of all shrewd fellows, to find yourself flung out on God's rubbish-heap, where the worm of remorse is always gnawing, and the fire never dies down." Read from this point of view, the passage means: "If it is a question of manhood versus ease, success, or mechanical efficiency, choose manhood, no matter what pain or loss the choice may entail." It has no direct reference to self-mutilation; it is not self-denial that is recommended for the sake of self-denial, but self-denial for the sake of the better kind of fitness.

As for the practice of Jesus, there is no evidence that He needed to "beat His body black and blue, to keep it in harness," as Paul and so many of His followers have found occasion to do. His disciples, He said, would feast when He was with them, and "fast" only when He was taken away; neither convivial merriment nor abstinence are ends in themselves, for both are sacramental, that is, they are symbolic of spiritual realities. The Gospels know nothing either of feasting for the satisfaction of appetite or fasting for the mortification of the flesh. To the Oriental to "eat one's morsel alone" was a grave misdemeanour; in the parable the rich fool was a fool because he planned to eat, drink, and be merry by himself. It was when Judas had shared the bread with Jesus that "Satan entered" into him, for that he was indifferent to such an appeal, to an Eastern the token of complete trust and friendship that knows no reservations and demands unswerving loyalty, was his condemnation. As feasting together is the symbol of joy in fellowship, so fasting is the natural expression of separation and regret. The

disciple will not fast because he feels he must as because in certain moods of homesickness, inevitable to a lover of His Lord, it is the only thing suitable to his condition.

But the chief concern of Jesus is not that we should keep Lent or refrain from doing so, as that in any case we should consume our own smoke, we should not make others suffer because of our self-denial. Those who fast for appearance sake, because they have a reputation for strictness to keep up, He says, affect a sour expression and destroy their natural good looks; they resent the ill-timed hilarity of other people, and are specially anxious that everybody should be aware that they are not going out to parties or playing cards this year. The disciple, on the other hand, is at such times to be better groomed and, if anything, more sociable than usual; the attention of his friends is not to be drawn to the fact that he is denying himself. He will not shadow their joy or rebuke their indulgence by bringing into prominence the hard tasks at which he labours or the good things he does without. His dark hours he will keep to himself, and will take pains not to let his devotion make him disagreeable or allow the hardship he endures to sour him. In days when good works are left more and more to the faithful few it is specially difficult to avoid parading the fact that we are doing work that others should be sharing with us. When Jesus was happy, He could not have His friends too near; He *drew near* to His disciples on the mountain of Transfiguration "and touched them"; in Gethsemane, on the other hand, He would not let them come too close or see too much, and bade them pray



that they should not enter into association with His grief or become involved in His trial. He shared His joys, and kept His darkest sorrows to Himself.

We find in this passage a new ideal of sociability. The disciple will have no need of a well-spread table or convivial company to make him unnaturally cheerful. Lightness of heart is native to him; the grief about him is for ever breaking in upon his peace, and for a while his mind is clouded, but the sun shines out again. On the last night, though the passion was so close upon Him and the traitor so near that He could not share the cup of good-fellowship with His friends, Jesus was still the soul of the company, He could still shut the door upon whatever the next hour might bring. Nor was it a forced cheerfulness; never was His peace more obviously His own than on the eve of His parting from it. The pagan mind forgets its native heaviness and gloom by the help of wine and good company, for a little while forgetting to be unhappy, but the foundation of the Christian's life lies secure in the centre of peace; sometimes the sorrows of the world about him or his own sense of unworthiness may darken the natural brightness of his spirit, and he forgets to be happy for a while, but the hidden life of the heart will reassert itself before long; his reactions are ever from depression to happiness, because his mind swings back easily from an uncongenial world and a disappointing self to rest upon his adorable Lord. "He has often tried to be a philosopher, but cheerfulness will keep breaking in."

## XVII

### On the Saving of Money

So far the Master's description of the new way of life He came to establish has dealt with the disciple's relation to *persons*—his brother, his Father, himself. The rest of chapter vi is concerned with his hold upon *things*, and one of the most important things as well as one of the most difficult to handle, is money. Jesus regards money as serving in the thoughts and plans of its would-be possessors three main purposes; it professes to provide the promise of security in the future, maintenance in the present, and the means of a beautiful life—in other words, as guaranteeing continued existence, insurance, and adornment. Things—that is, property generally—obviously take second place in the scheme of Jesus, though He is aware that they tend to take first place with some of us; perhaps it is true that there is a never-ending competition between the claims of persons and those of things upon our time and energy. Jesus is clearly very decidedly on the side of personal relations; “you cannot be in bondage to God (the Person) and Mammon (the thing) at the same time!” At home you can either have happy children or undisturbed tidiness; it is difficult to do justice to both together. You can either give yourself up to your

family or your books, for in all departments of life no man can be entirely at the disposal of two masters.

The perennial problem is that of striking a just balance. Again, as in the case of home and country, country and world, there need be no mutual exclusion, if we can keep clear of fanaticism and excessive specialisation. But that a real competition exists there can be no question, nor indeed that we have often to curb our natural bent towards our favourite pursuits if we are to keep our souls and remain human. "Better," says Jesus, "cut off hand or foot," better feel ourselves futile and inefficient to the end of our days than become ever so perfect in one department, but only perfect machines. The case of the Gerasene swine is enough to show that Jesus cared little or nothing about property, even when it was other people's property, if it came into conflict with the interests of a *man*; there is no suggestion of compensation for the loss of the pigs.

Jesus deals first of all with the case of those who have more money than they need for present necessities, then with those who cannot meet day-by-day expenses for maintenance without a good deal of scheming. Does "lay not up your treasure upon earth" mean that we are not to save or invest money or think about the future at all? We have no definite word of His to settle the point, for the parable of the talents does not involve approval of a system of "interest" any more than that of the unjust steward implies a favourable verdict upon the social and industrial order which the steward used in so business-like a fashion. The commercial system characteristic of the age is cited in both cases as *an illustration*, its essential rightness or

otherwise not being under discussion. Our Lord's main emphasis seems to be upon the word "treasure." A moderate insurance may indeed be plausibly defended as an aid to the living of an undistracted life. It is clear, too, from Mark vii. 9 ff. that Jesus took family responsibilities very seriously, so that we cannot be far wrong when we say that the duty of proper provision for those whom we have made our own or who have made themselves our own by their devotion is part of His plan of life for men who, unlike Himself, are not free to ignore these questions altogether. His mother was provided for by His brothers, and when they, or some of them, proved themselves unsympathetic at the crisis of her life, He saw to it that she was taken care of by the beloved disciple. Perhaps our inference should be that we are to do what we can, but that our chief reliance for ourselves and for those who depend upon us should not be placed in the money we can set apart for them.

If we over-insure, or are uneasy because we cannot insure adequately against personal and domestic risks, or if we are altogether carried away in the event of our investments being lost, or the bank in which we have laid up our savings breaking, we betray the fact that our trust rests upon a false basis, that the house of our life has been built upon sand. No one in these days of swaying exchanges and the general depreciation of securities, needs to have it explained to him what "moth and rust doth corrupt" means, or requires persuasion that money investments are precarious at best. As always, Jesus builds His doctrine upon rock-bottom fact, for the truth is that all our insurances can never



really insure us; when all is said and done, we have to trust in the Heavenly Father; no other final security is open to us. This does not absolve us from doing what we can for ourselves, for there is a world of difference between living *in* and living *on* trust. If our easy living ends in making us a burden upon others, the fact that we have not worried about the future does not make our carelessness Christian. Nevertheless, it remains true that all the trouble and forethought in the world cannot achieve a certain provision even of the bare necessities of life. We have a precarious tenure anyhow, and it is not getting any less precarious as the years go by and insurance premiums rise.

But Jesus is never content merely with a piece of excellent advice. The time came when He felt Himself responsible for a large and very exacting family, consisting as it did of "five thousand men, not counting women and children." Nothing could be done to cater for their wants by any organization of relief, and they were in that desolate place after closing time, simply because they had followed Him. At last they were ready to share round—this is very important—whatever was forthcoming, and as Head of the family He taught them what the trustful spirit which He had recommended could do. The loaves were multiplied, as they always are when men are reduced to a brotherhood of common destitution, and all alike have learned from their necessity the lesson of trust. There would be no special meaning for us in the story, if the miracle had never been repeated; loaves have been multiplied times without number in the adventurous history of the poor. It may well be, so one leading economist tells

us, that before the present world-crisis has passed, many of us who little dream that real want can ever come our way will be tested to the uttermost. Then we shall discover where our "treasure" really is—perhaps also what Christian brotherhood can mean. We remind ourselves that it was when men were willing to share round that the loaves were multiplied, but must leave the human factor in the problem of provision for all to another chapter.

## XVIII

### Then Why Does Provision Fail?

A HINT was given at the end of last chapter that it was only when men were willing to share round whatever food was to be found in the company that the loaves were multiplied. When we consider this, which is after all the ultimate problem for society in this life—how to keep men and women alive—we come to see how extraordinarily strong the temptation must have been to Jesus to turn stones into bread. The exercise of such a power would have solved at a blow the most urgent and harassing difficulty of all—how to insure that men and women shall be kept in being at all for better things than loaves and fishes. How much trouble it would have saved the starving millions of Russia and the world if we could simply have met their need by praying that the stones of the steppes might be turned into bread! Jesus did it, or something like it, once; why did He not do it once and for all? Of course, it is true that if men did not have to work, they would cease to be men at all, but become molluscs of some kind. But the principle “if any man will not work, neither let him eat” does not cover the ground of such a catastrophe as this, a catastrophe perpetually recurring in history. The difference between the miracle of turning stones into bread in the desert and

multiplying loaves and fishes by the lake of Galilee is surely this—that in the first case God in Jesus would have been doing something for us, in the second He did something along with us—the loaves and fishes were contributed by people who might have had enough for themselves if they had held on to what they had, but who could not see how what they gave up could be made to go round if it went into the common stock. There was no harvest in Russia because of the long-continued drought in the spring, and we may call that a failure on the part of Providence if we will, but in Canada and America there was a surplus the same year; probably it is true that whenever there has been a shortage in one country, there has been a better crop than usual in another. As a matter of fact there is enough food in the world to feed every man, woman and child in Russia and everywhere else—it is man who has failed his brother.

We must remind ourselves again at this point of a truth which has come out clearly enough in our exposition of the earlier part of the Sermon, that the relations of the Father with His children and of the children with one another are interlocked. Help has come a thousand times to those in desperate need in what seemed to be miraculous ways, but it has come by human agency; we always have a share in answering our own prayers for God's other children. In these days we are not allowed to be ignorant any longer of any calamity that has fallen upon or threatens any of our brothers from one end of the world to the other; isolation was never splendid; it is now seen to be impossible. Unless we feed the Russians, we are told on



the best authority we shall be visited before long with pestilence, if not with famine, and this is not because God takes vengeance upon our hardness of heart, but just because we are all bound up in the bundle of life together, and there is no escape. Perhaps this point does not need labouring, but there are two questions which cry out for some kind of treatment. First, does the philosophy of life and social relations which underlies the teaching of Jesus involve economic communism? and, second, what part has the Church, the fellowship of believers, to play in the manifest unrest and insecurity of our times? As to the first question, it may be true that we can never make men equal, or, if we could, would they remain equal for long? The economic possibility of absolute communism is a matter on which the experts must be heard; on the whole, they may perhaps be said to be against it. The fact remains that the first disciples of Jesus were in practice communists, and that one of the results of the coming of the Spirit of Jesus upon the fellowship was that an experiment was made in that direction. Whether that attempt was a success or not is not relevant, for its failure was due to a breakdown in human nature, to the coming into the fellowship of people who had never been imbued with its spirit, not to any defect in the idea. These facts—I believe they are indisputable—show us very clearly in which direction the truest Christian instinct will manifest itself. The bias of the disciple who has the mind of Christ will always be towards communism. But what was said about divorce in a previous chapter is true also in this matter. It is one thing to say that the disciple will live a communistic

life in practice so far as he can, it is quite another to suggest that communism should be made compulsory, or that the Church should seek to impose its own standard on the state by pressure from outside. To say that for Christians marriage is indissoluble is not to say that we should seek to secure legislation making divorce impossible for all: such a theory—the theory I mean of the eternal validity of the marriage-bond—does impose too great a strain upon un-Christianised human nature. We should leave it open to men and women to take some less binding vow, if they cannot make a profession of absolute loyalty to the command of Christ about marriage, but we should not sanction such marriage by use of Church premises and the Christian rite. In much the same way, we are riding for a very bad fall if we try to make communism compulsory either inside or outside the Church. For the Church was never intended to be the home merely of mature Christians; it is to be a hospital rather than a fraternity of people who agree on all matters that concern the interpretation of the law of Christ. The bias of the fully-developed and instructed believer will always be towards communism in his own practice, and if as the years go by we and other Christians do not find ourselves making experiments in that direction in regard to our own practice, we should gravely question whether after all we have the Master's spirit; <sup>1</sup> we have no right to insist upon all would-be members of the Church taking a vow of communism; even the early

<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, it now appears from the diary of one of his preachers, formulated a scheme for a voluntary communism in his "societies," but it was discouraged by his more cautious helpers.

Christians, as is clear from the Acts of the Apostles, never dreamt of this.

We have no right to demand from those who wish to enter our fellowship anything more, it seems to me, than a general profession of a desire to follow Christ; but ought we to be in a position to offer them some kind of organisation which may be to them a visible realisation of the fact of Christian brotherhood, which may give them the chance of learning what trust in the Heavenly Father means? There is very little substance in the observation, so often made, that we ought not to make the entrance into the Church too easy; nothing could be more indulgent than the reception given to the prodigal son by the father, the only requirement suggested by the story being that he wanted to come; even his beginnings of penitence were smothered in a kiss. We ought to take in everybody who professes a real desire to join us, and "easy come" is the only way recognised by Jesus. In these days at least men do not join the Church, except for the reason that they feel the need to do so. Demands will be made presently and the road will become rough and troublesome; the gate may be narrow, but it should at least be wide open. We are not likely to fall into the mistake of encouraging people to come in for what they can get; the truth is that we ought to be able to offer them very much more than we do.

Is it reasonable, for instance, to exhort men not to worry about the future, if we make no attempt to help them carry our advice into practice, to provide the possibility of the undistracted life for them? Too often our preaching of the Sermon on the Mount is in the



air, because we have not done our part to help the people whom we exhort to live the life we preach. In the matter of providing security for His children, God works through the other members of the family. When Jesus bade men leave all to follow Him, He built up at the same time a fellowship in which those who joined would not be allowed to worry, because there was no need for it; the rest of the brothers saw to that. Is not the time coming when we shall have to make it possible to say to those who seek to join us, "If you come in and try to follow the law of Christ with us, we will see that neither you nor your wife and children are allowed to go under." It can surely never be argued by anyone who has read the Gospels with any kind of attention that the Church's business is with spiritual, and not with material matters; that is a distinction for which there is no warrant anywhere either in the teaching or the practice of Jesus. The time is coming when, so far from discouraging insurance, the Church will have to offer the security of her resources to her poorer members; when adventurous experiments will have to be made in a new kind of friendly society, in which the first consideration shall not be ability to contribute, but need. Nor is it right that we should expect the poor man to expose his income and expenditure to us, or prove that he is a deserving case, unless the rich man is required also, if necessary, to put his private accounts on the table. It is an interesting and suggestive fact that the two Christian Churches which have increased most rapidly during the last few years are precisely the two societies which demand the least profession of faith on entrance



and the utmost openness and unreserve afterwards—I mean the Roman Catholic Church and the Society of Friends. In this direction at least I believe they are substantially right. We must either give up preaching the life of trustfulness in God and our brother at all, or we must experiment until we have found out a way of providing some kind of visible embodiment of the law of life we proclaim in practice. We have no business to make any such organisation of Christian ideals compulsory upon all Church-members; it is our business to see that such adventures in fellowship are undertaken and that everyone has the option of entering a really communistic brotherhood. It is also incumbent upon us never to require a confidence from anyone else, which we are not prepared to give him in return, with precisely the same sacrifice in privacy.

## XIX

### Necessities and Luxuries

JESUS deals at greater length with the problem of those to whom the provision of the bare necessities of life must always occupy most of their waking thought. They, He says, have the same resource as rich people who can save money have, the only safeguard open to any man—the love of the Heavenly Father. We have tried, in the last chapter, to face the greatest difficulty here—the fact that the loving provision of the Father may not reach His neediest children, because the other members of the family keep too much to themselves. We must not forget that Jesus Himself knew what the extreme of poverty meant, that He had lived amongst people who must often have wondered, when the harvest failed, or under pressure of debt they were forced to sell their little scrap of land to some wealthy Greek landowner, where their next meal was to come from. When the crop was a failure, the whole village would suffer, and the village tradesman would be hard hit like the rest. Many of these Galileans had become little better than serfs on the estates of Gentiles, and those who had managed to keep their small holdings, were hopelessly in debt to members of the publican class, many of whom were private and very oppressive money-lenders, as well as collectors of customs and

excise. The amazing thing is that Jesus never shows a trace of class-bitterness; if we want a side-light upon conditions among the peasant-class of Palestine we must go to the "Egyptian rubbish-heaps" from which the most pitiful appeals against the profiteers of that age have come down to us in extraordinary numbers, or in the New Testament to the Epistle of James: "Do not the rich drag you to the courts of justice?" "Behold, the pay of the men who reaped your lands, so long withheld by you, cries out against you and the cry of your harvesters has come to the ears of the Lord of Hosts!" In the Sermon on the Mount, on the other hand, the "adversary" is only mentioned casually, but a little imagination will help us to see the tragedies that lie behind the references to the law-courts and forced labour, to the "heavy-laden working people."

At first sight it seems cold comfort to tell people harassed as so many of the peasants of Galilee were, to go and study the wild birds, who are fed by the Heavenly Father, though they do not sow or reap or lay up a store for the winter. Certainly our needs are immeasurably greater, and less easily met; we cannot be satisfied with "an ounce of hempseed." There is a saying of Jesus found in a Mohammedan book, which deals with this very point, and it is so delightfully humorous that we should like to believe it genuine. "But if you say, Our stomachs are greater than theirs (the birds), consider the camels." The camel seems to have attracted Jesus by its grotesque outline, and in another place He pictures a man trying to gulp down a camel—a delightful subject for an artist skilled in the grotesque—and a camel trying to drag its hump through

a needle's eye; I have been assured by those who have watched the antics of this clumsy but very useful quadruped that its manœuvres are a perpetual feast for the contemplative eye. Queer and awkward as the camel is, he is an excellent example of the adaptation of means to ends by a tirelessly ingenious providence, and his digestive apparatus is the most wonderful part of him. He is specially made for the thirsty barren desert, and can go short of food and water for days together without inconvenience. Jesus knew by His own experience in the wilderness of Judæa that the Father can keep His children alive under the most difficult circumstances, if they are trustful and obedient. Though we are such complicated creatures, we are not to think that we are so perplexing a problem to Him as we are to ourselves. We sometimes talk as if there never had been anybody quite like us before, as if our temperaments were as baffling to our Father as they are to us. Jesus answers us playfully; do you think that a God who has a place in His world for things so different as birds and camels, is going to be beaten by you? The resources of providence are not exhausted when we can see no way out; our Father may be a little cleverer than we give Him credit for being sometimes.

But apart from what are called the bare necessities, Jesus knows that we need more than just to be kept alive. He never sought to force a pinched and unnaturally meagre way of life upon His disciples. He said once, according to Mark's Gospel, that no one had parted with anything good for His Gospel's sake which he would not get back many times over in this life:



"fathers and mothers" (the best reading here is that of the Western text—"mother"—we can do with any number of fathers, but one mother is enough for any man), "brothers and sisters," and so on. Nor does He leave the amenities of life to the other world. Whether we know it or not, an element of beauty, a "grain of glory" in our life here is a necessity, not a mere luxury. But men's longing for beauty is often like their need for God; it is not by any means always a felt want; the effect of its absence can only be traced in a misdirected restlessness. Those of us who have lived much in colliery districts know very well why the miner seems never to be contented, though he squats with apparent complacency among the cinders at the public-house corner. How can he be anything but blindly rebellious, when God made him one thing and we have made him another? The detestable and inhuman ugliness of the places we give him to live in has soaked into him, and he is all out of gear, he does not know why. There was little industrial unrest, we are told, a generation ago. Now shorter hours and a poor modicum of education, we hear it said, have only left him at the mercy of the "agitator." It is the condemnation of the industrial system of thirty years ago that there was no unrest. It was then that these vile "rows" were built; they were the foul deposit of a system which left men content to live in surroundings only fit for beasts, for the sake of pay, of a bare subsistence. Human nature can never settle down to that and will assert itself, because God made men to live a man's life. The agitators are not the trade-union leaders, but the unconquerable instincts of men. It is

no answer to say that when these people are given decent surroundings they turn them into a slum; very likely that will be the case with many of them for a long time to come, because our system has made them like that. God knows what they might have been but for us, and if there is only one here and there who can take advantage of such reparation as we can make to him, we must "take care not to despise one of these little ones." Meanwhile we can never hope for assured peace—there can be none—until every man has a reasonable opportunity of a life with some beauty in it as well as of mere existence. We should be thankful for an unrest which shows that human nature is not yet crushed by a tyranny of a system.

What can be really learnt from birds and flowers? God feeds the birds and dresses the flowers, and we, too, need maintenance and beauty; we cannot with immunity starve ourselves or other people of either. Jesus does not tell us to try and be like birds and flowers; the effort would only make us ridiculous. Certainly, as things are, we can never hope to live as carelessly as the birds or as gaily as the flowers. Why tell us then to "study" the wild birds and "learn a lesson from" the lilies? The ornithologist tells us that the birds do make preparation for the future; certainly, very many of them fly away from the winter. It must be remembered that Jesus was an artist, not a scientific observer; nor was He specially interested in birds and flowers for their own sake; He was content with instinctive impressions. The man who is passionately fond of nature study and largely indifferent to the human nature about him would have scant sympathy

from Him. People have found fault with Paul because he said "Doth God care for oxen?" Here, as usual, his instinct was right, though his method of expression may have been unfortunate. If God is the Father of Whom Jesus spoke, His chief concern must always be His children. Jesus puts it in all kinds of ways: "How much better is a man than a sheep?" "Are you not much better than birds?" "Not a sparrow falls to the ground . . . the very hairs of *your* head are all numbered." Though the home of the Lord's spirit was with nature, His thoughts were always with men and women. In the silence of the Galilean hills He prayed for the people sleeping in the crowded towns below. On the lake a sharp, easy, casual word is enough to quiet the winds and waves; His concern is with the disciples and their condition. There is very little "cosmic emotion" in the Gospels, and Shakespeare, whose nature-poetry provides simply an effective background for the busy life of men, is nearer to the mind of Jesus than Wordsworth. His thought of men is perfectly expressed in that glorious hymn, which for some inscrutable reason has been left out of our Methodist hymn-book; they are "flowers of God's heart."

The close observer will tell us that many birds starve in the winter, and it is quite likely that someone will criticise the Gospels on the ground that birds have been known to mope, that they get worried sometimes. That would not trouble us; it is still generally true that provision is made for the birds and that there is an atmosphere of gaiety about all their proceedings. They cater for their young ones, but always sing most mer-



rily in the busy season. We can learn from birds and flowers just to be ourselves without strain or self-importance, that the provision which God makes for us, whether of food or clothing, whether of that which feeds the body or that which sustains the soul, is ever so much more satisfying than any we can contrive by our own exertions. We have a native right to beauty, and were born not simply to keep ourselves and those whom God has given us alive, but to satisfy our unconquerable instinct for the artistic expression of all that He has put into us. Only it is the same in this department of life as in so many others; the more we worry about providing ourselves with the means of beauty or self-expression, the uglier and more futile we become, just as the more we think about our dignity, the less we have. We are not to get anxious about ourselves, how to make ends meet or—as most of us are more likely to be tempted to do—how we are going to afford the new suit or new costume we want so badly; we are not to be ambitious to distinguish ourselves, to shine by our accomplishments or our refined tastes, but to learn the lesson from birds and flowers that the most beautiful things are always the most natural, the least affected or conscious of their beauty. The birds work for their living, but only make a song about it in one sense of the phrase, not in the other. The flowers do not make or choose their own clothes, yet even Solomon at his most gorgeous—when, for instance, he met the Queen of Sheba—would look offensively vulgar and overdressed, if judged by the standards set by the commonest of wild flowers. The Syrian peasant still calls the lilies which carpet



the fields about his village in the early spring "common grass," and flings them contemptuously into the village oven, in which the housewives take turns to bake their bread. God cares for beauty, all artistry comes by His inspiration, and He made everything beautiful in its own way; because you have to work so hard and scheme so much, all the more for that reason are you precious to your Father, who has not made some things and people to be useful, and others beautiful, but everything and everybody to be both. The natural creation, like the ninety-nine good people "who need no repentance," can more or less be left to look after itself; the "one lost sheep" of humanity has more than its share of the Father's heart. For the necessary "luxuries" of life, as for what are called its necessities, we have to depend in the last resort, not upon what we can get for ourselves, but upon the fact that our Father knows we need all these things.

## XX

### “Seek Ye First”

IF all that Jesus has said about the design of God is true, it is certain that life ought not to be as drab as it is; it is not true that the best and most devout people are also the best company, as by the theory of v. 33 they surely ought to be. If concentration of thought and desire upon the life of service and devotion means, as Jesus says, that all the things of which He has been speaking in the verses before—food for the body, peace of mind, the satisfaction of our natural craving for a full and beautiful life—come our way without effort, the Christian ought not only to be the most earnest, but the happiest, the most secure and most attractive of men. We take it for granted that the life of entire self-surrender involves a giving-up of many beautiful and quite innocent interests, and our idealisation of pain and sacrifice has affected not only the manners and speech, but even the dress of very many good people. Christians are not so drab or dull as outsiders suppose them to be, for they generalise from a few melancholy instances, but the impression that we are out against natural joy is so widespread in the thought of the average man as well as in our literature, from Dickens downwards, that we ought to ask ourselves the question, is there any justification at all for what is, on

the whole, unquestionably an unfair judgment? I do not believe that we can escape the conclusion that the religious public in the mass does not do credit to the Master's teaching about beauty. Proverbs are proverbially unfair, but generally contain some grains of truth; it ought not to be possible still to say or think "Heaven for climate, and hell for company," as most of us have done after association with those who are unmistakably good people. There is no escaping the fact that Christian men and women are not popular, and that this is not always due to their unpopular opinions.

There is no doubt that Jesus never dreamed that His disciples would accept either pain or gloom as the price to be paid for a place in His service. "If I find Him, if I follow, what his guerdon here? Many a labour, many a sorrow, many a tear" would not, one thinks after reading the sixth of Matthew, be accepted by Him as an interpretation of the life to which He called men. He came with good news, to find Him was to come upon hidden treasure, even hardship and persecution borne for His sake was to be a source of exultation, His yoke was to be easy to wear, His burden no burden at all. I suggest with some diffidence that too much has been made of the saying about taking up the cross. I am inclined to think that what He said originally was "let him take up My yoke and follow Me." It was not His custom to use phrases which His disciples could not possibly understand, and surely *before the Cross* they could not have the slightest idea what taking up the cross meant. In Rome, where Mark's Gospel was written, slaves were whipped to the

cross with a yoke upon their necks; it is easy to see how, after Calvary, the cross, already associated with the yoke in the minds of Mark's readers, might take the place of the more natural and likely "yoke." Jesus certainly never attempted to slur over the fact that to follow Him would mean the extremest self-denial—indeed He emphasised the severity of His claim to utter surrender in a hundred ways—but all the same He came to *add* something to us, not primarily to take away. He re-enforces the authority of the decalogue, but for Himself never utters a "Thou shalt not"; even the golden rule, known already in the negative form, "Do not to others what you would not have them do to you" is made positive. "I came that they might have life, and have enough and to spare." The friends of Jesus cannot fast when He is with them; they should fast when He was to be taken away, but those days are over now. The word that applies to us is "I with you *all* the days."

I cannot help thinking that we have not learnt what He really meant by "Seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness." We have interpreted the words "His Kingdom" as meaning some consummation for which we long with hope ever-deferred, and "His righteousness" as an inward perfection which seems to be for ever becoming less possible for us. But He is Himself the Kingdom, and He is our righteousness; to be persecuted "for righteousness' sake" and for His sake is the same thing. Partisans of a cause are often very dull people, however good the cause may be, while lovers are always interesting: "all the world loves a lover." The essentially Christian thing is not our



devotion to an ideal—all earnest people share that with us—not even the aspiration after perfection—but just love to the person of Jesus. That involves devotion to the cause and the constant pursuit of a higher and deeper inward life, it is true, but the balance is altered. We possess Jesus, we do not yet see all things subject to Him, nor have we been already made perfect; but the predominant fact, that to which we swing back again from all reactions, can be, even now, not what we long for, but what we have. It is true that to the man who is in love with his Lord, all other things are added. To prove this, we can only fall back upon experience. As long as Jesus has been real enough to us to be the constant subject of our thought, the centre on which our mind falls back when its attention is not needed for other things, we have been provided for; the right word has come when it was needed, the mind has been kept fresh, the fear of a breakdown of health or of the failure of our power to provide for those for whom we are responsible has been taken from us, we have come into a treasure of beauty in nature, in art and poetry, in married love, and in the company of friends—all these good things have become available for us and have taken a new meaning because He has been central to them all. When, on the other hand, we have been less conscious of Him, doubts and fears have slipped back, devotion has been difficult, service most laborious; disappointment has soon told upon us then, and we have become bad company to ourselves and others, for the dulness and heaviness which seems to be the normal state of many people in middle life has come down upon us.

The ideal suggested here is by no means an attempt to forget the painful facts of life or to substitute ecstasy for intellectual honesty. Any kind of effort to carry out the Sermon on the Mount must inevitably commit the disciple to a refusal to rest content with things as they are, and this means unrest within and opposition without. This may be taken for granted; but the point is, does God Our Father mean us to carry the burden of obedience without the exhilaration which the realised presence of the Master alone can bring? To be perpetually working for a Kingdom which never seems to come any nearer, to be continually striving after an ideal which recedes as we advance, is not and cannot be exhilarating; it is not a natural condition for God's creatures, for in His world all things are full of health and gladness, and fulfil the law of their being. The common man revolts against religious people not because they are good—his very phrase "a white man" shows that he loves goodness—but because they do not seem to be natural, they appear to him to live a strained and thwarted existence. Undoubtedly the Christian life can never be really easy—perhaps it was never meant to be—but do we not make it harder than it need be when we leave out, or consign to the occasional experience, what He said was to be the secret source of all our strength, a transporting and compensating experience of the living Christ? To distinguish between the human and divine in Him, to talk of the "Jesus of history" and "the Christ of experience," is, to the lover of his Lord, to make an unreal and unnecessary differentiation; it is just Jesus, the Jesus who comes alive as he pores over the Gospels or thinks of Him as he

sits dreaming over the fire at night, the Jesus who makes disappointment bearable, who is Himself the only answer we can give to all the perplexing problems of life within and without us. When we can say “Yes, all that you say is true; but I have Him,” then we shall have a message of enrichment, not of deprivation, we shall be able to face all the facts and meet all opposition unflinchingly, for whether we lose faith in ourselves and our ideal or not, we shall always be sure of Him, and with Him the ideal will come to life again; love will bring us back to faith and hope.

## XXI

### His Life of Trust and Our Distrustfulness

WE may fancy that at this point of the Sermon Jesus became conscious that the crowds He had left at the foot of the hill had discovered His retreat, so that His audience was no longer the small circle of His attached disciples. That large numbers were present at the end of the discourse is clear from the evangelist's comment: "It came to pass that *the crowds* were astonished at His teaching." He lifts His eyes and sees them drifting up the hill, and the pity which never failed to move Him when He saw a "harassed and dejected" company of tired people comes into His voice. How could they be expected not to worry? They had all they could do to make ends meet and keep alive. A beautiful life seemed to be out of the range of possibility for them. So He gives them a piece of very homely advice, shrewd and practical, but with a world of truth behind it. "If you must worry, do not worry any more than you must. Every day brings its own burden of care, I know," as who should know better than He, who had been brought up amongst them—"let to-morrow look after itself," for "one day's trouble at a time is as much as you can manage." The only way to make a life of incessant care and toil tolerable is to take it in daily instalments.



This maxim might seem at first sight to be simply a fragment of proverbial philosophy with little bearing upon our deeper problems. As a matter of fact, we have only to examine Our Lord's teaching a little more closely to see that it runs down into the very texture of His thoughts about God and man. It recurs constantly in different forms: in the Lord's prayer, "Give us to-day our food for the coming day"; in "Let him take up his cross daily"; in "Ask, and it shall be given you," and in many other places. One of the secrets of the Christian's peace is to be found in the fact that, led by the Good Shepherd and followed by goodness and mercy, he need not look before and after. That Jesus Himself lived by the day is proved by very many suggestions in the Gospels. His brothers taunt Him with unwillingness to go up to a feast in Jerusalem and take the risk of publicity; He says He does not intend to go, then changes His mind and goes. He is always busy, but will never let Himself be hurried because He must get somewhere in a given time; so He is at leisure to give Himself undistractedly to a chance encounter, like that with the woman on the way to Jairus' house, or with the woman of Samaria. His brothers, He told them, lived by schedule; their time was "always ready," arranged beforehand. So was the goal of *His* journey, for "the Son of Man is going on His way as was appointed for Him," but till the hour of destiny came He was content to wait and feel His way from point to point. The most signal instance of His refusal to take anxious thought of the morrow, His habit of taking everything in its turn, comes on the eve of His passion, when He succeeds in

the upper room in giving Himself altogether to the task of comforting and supporting His friends, while He shuts the door, save for a momentary disturbance when Judas goes out, upon whatever the next hour was to bring. As one day's food will not do for to-morrow, so He lived by a constantly renewed obedience and a trust confirmed by the knowledge that so far each day's demand had been met.

"His love in times past forbids me to think  
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;  
And each Ebenezer I have in review  
Confirms His good pleasure to bring me quite through."

All very true and beautiful, we say, but life is a more complicated business than these easy theories allow. If we were as sure of God as Jesus was, or if other people could not thwart what we presume are His purposes, it might be possible to live this undistracted, unhurried life. As to the other people who hinder us, Jesus deals with our relations with them later on. Here we are concerned with the first difficulty—that we cannot think of God, no matter how we preach to ourselves or study birds and flowers, as He did. We have left out one verse which may be said to lay bare the secret of our trustlessness; if we cannot trust God as He did it is because we cannot see Him; and we cannot see Him, not because He is not everywhere about us, but because there is a darkness in our spirits which was not in Jesus. In the cottage where He was brought up the lamp was never allowed to go out at night; if by any mischance it did go out, the darkness would be quite intolerable to the inmates of the house,

for they were utterly unaccustomed to it. But the lamp was simply a bowl of oil, and very much would depend on the quality of the oil used. If the oil was pure, there would be a flame clear enough to keep the little room reasonably well lit; if it was of indifferent quality, as it must often have been in the peasant cottage, it would flicker and smoke, and make the dark shadows in the recesses of the room more menacing. Throughout the Bible there runs the horror of the dark; even the fishermen on the lake, we are told, burn oiled rags at night, partly to attract the fish, but also because they dread unrelieved darkness. God has set a light within us, says Jesus, by which alone the world about us can look in the least like a home. "The lamp that lights up or plunges into darkness your outward life is your eye"—in other words your way of looking out at the things and the people about you; as we should say, your outlook upon life. "If your outlook is generous"—that is the secondary meaning of the word translated "single"—all your outward life will be radiant; if it is churlish and grudging, the world about you will look dark indeed. If the light of natural good nature, of human feeling, burns smokily or goes out, of course the darkness will appal you.

We were very much at home in the world once, but now the world does not look to us the kind of place in which we can live the life of simple trustfulness, not so much because the world is wrong—it is, largely because it is made up of people like ourselves—as because something has gone wrong with us. It is partly the world's fault, but not altogether. When Jesus talks of birds and flowers, the sunshine and the rain, we



think of cholera, blackwater fever and famine; when He talks of fathers giving good gifts to their children, we think—how can we help it?—of fathers giving curses and blows to their children. Life, we say, looks like the clear fresh picture which Jesus paints, only in patches, in specially selected instances. And this partly because we have an unnatural bias towards thinking the worst of life; we ignore the happiness and take it for granted, but the darker side we can never forget. This only proves that we, like the peasants of Syria, are more accustomed to the sunshine than the dark.

It is not altogether satisfactory to say that cholera and a drunken father—to take our two instances together for the moment—are part of the human complex, for the chief reason why we cannot think rightly of God is that we do not think rightly of man. We are made, and the world we live in is so made, that our outlook upon man reacts upon our thought of God and of ourselves. That is one of the many reasons why we should hold fast to the real humanity of Jesus, for we can never set a proper value upon human nature until we see its strength and beauty in Him. We perpetually underestimate the goodness of the average man and woman. We talk of the degeneracy of the times; then war comes, and thousands of the people we have been ignorantly denouncing march to their death for us. A year or two later we are again dilating upon the sins of these same young people! We chatter about the decay of parental love, and one visit to the parks on any fine Saturday in any town would show to us, if it were not too common to be noticed, hundreds of young fathers giving their leisure time, with unweary-



ing patience and good humour, to the children, who take it all for granted like the rest of us. If the world was as bad as we sometimes affect to think we could not sleep o' nights. There is something pitifully mean in the spectacle of men whining about the times with the comfort and security around them which are only possible because the world has been kinder to them than they deserve. "If the light that is in you," if the natural good humour you were born with, has given place to darkness, how great is the darkness? A little thoughtful observation can help us a good deal in this matter, but when all is said that can be said by way of relief there are darker mysteries behind the common humanities of workaday life on which we have no light as yet. Jesus will help us to explore them, and has an answer to our last and most unescapable forebodings, if we will be patient. While we wait to see what His answer is, we can prepare to listen by reminding ourselves once again that, whatever virtue seems unnatural to men, our very language, when we speak of "humanity," proves to us at least that it is natural to be trustful and kind. The Cross would not have happened as it did if Jesus could have got men to themselves, away from their parties and cliques; all but He were caught in the machine, and so He was able to say, when we had done our worst, "Father, *forgive* them; for they know not what they do."

## CHAPTER XXII

### What are We to do with Our Critical Faculty?

WE have discussed our Lord's picture of His new way of life in some detail now, and at every turn have been impressed with its perfect naturalness, simplicity, and beauty. But all the while, even when for the moment carried away from our bearings by the glorious persuasiveness of Jesus, we are conscious of what the Friends call "a stop in our minds." Granted that it is true, as Mr. G. K. Chesterton has said, that, though the first time you read the Sermon on the Mount you feel that it turns everything upside down, the second time you read it you discover that it has turned everything rightside up, yet we cannot get it into focus somehow; only in very exalted moods do we ever fancy the whole of it possible for us. If we are one way up, and the man described by Jesus is the other way up, how are we ever to twist ourselves about so as to be able to see life from His angle? It does not help us much to tell us that we were like that when we were children, or even that we have sometimes been like that since. We can never be children again for long, nor can we count upon the continuance or the recurrence of the great moment. Sometimes the ideal of Jesus seems quite near, as if, when we turned the next corner, our working life might look to us as it

looked to Him; but the moment passes, something happens to disenchant us, or someone breaks in upon us who cannot be made to fit in with the scheme, and we drop back into our normal critical and suspicious selves. Jesus goes on to deal with some of our doubts and questions, and we will hear what He says next before we take a wider survey.

Undoubtedly our power of criticising things and people is given us by God; even Satan, the arch-critic, was originally one of the "sons of God." Elsewhere Jesus expostulates with His enemies for their lack of critical judgment; "why do you not of your own selves judge what is right?" and in another place, "Judge not according to appearance, but pass a righteous judgment (upon the facts before you)." We might infer that our critical faculty should rather be exercised upon things than upon people, but this would perhaps be too sweeping. Our great safeguard is to have a reasoned conviction of our own liability to critical assault, for the world treats us, in the long run, as we treat the world. Jesus illustrates from the thrust and parry of the carpenter's shop when splinters were flying; it is because we have a whole log in our own eye that we see so much wrong with our brother's.

Experience with ourselves inclines us to be sceptical of the possibility of ideal virtue to start with. Still more distorting is the bias towards believing the worst which comes from the evil in ourselves of which we are not aware. Dark indeed looks the world outside to the man the windows of whose soul are darkened, and this is more or less true of all of us. "Judge not your friends," said one of the Rabbis, "till you come into his

place"; but to very few is given an imagination sympathetic enough to enable us to do this by anticipation, and, when we do find ourselves actually in the same position, it is generally too late. Again, we are left with the question, how are we to get our perspective right, how are we to cast the log out of our own eye? "If your eye is your hindrance," says Jesus, "pluck it out and cast it from you"; but how are we to do that? We shall be in a better position to answer this question if we approach it through what remains of the Sermon:

We may notice here that the positive exercise of the critical faculty has a distinct place in the scheme of Christian conduct of which the outline is given us in the Sermon. By the positive exercise of this faculty I mean all that our word "tact" suggests, and something more which for want of a better word we may call considerateness, a habit of determining how we shall approach a man, not so much by a far-sighted regard for our own interest, as by our critical appraisal of the bent of his mind. Most of us remember the intensity with which we resented the sarcasm of the schoolmaster who loved to be witty at our expense; the remembrance should make us careful in the use of our sense of humour. Jesus was never sarcastic at the expense of simple-minded people, only when He had to do with Rabbis and educated Pharisees; if we can judge from the Talmud, the Rabbis were very shrewd and witty themselves. Some might call His treatment of the Syro-Phœnician woman teasing, but at any rate she was well able to take her own part in a battle of wits. The tactful man restrains himself when an opportunity of scoring a neat point is given him, be-



cause he is afraid the other man may be able to give him a Roland for his Oliver; the Christian gentleman because he knows he cannot. So with our frivolity generally; we shall do well to be serious with dull people, and only give our pleasantries free rein in the company of friends who know us well enough not to imagine that there may be more in what we say than appears on the surface. People without humour themselves are merely bewildered by flippancy; we must not despise them or take a pleasure in the exposure of their dulness, for that is bullying. We must adapt our tone to our knowledge or ignorance of the kind of person with whom we have to deal, and this is where the critical faculty should come in.

The next verse is enough to show us that Jesus is under no illusions about some of those with whom we have to work. He was no credulous optimist; His parables are enough to show this. What a portrait-gallery of very life-like but very unideal people we have there! The rich fool, whose sole idea of happiness is to have a good meal all by himself, who gloats over the prospect of keeping everybody else away from his ghoulish merriment; the sly dog of a steward who pulls the strings so cleverly; the prodigal son who spends his father's money before the time when it would come to him in the course of nature, and only comes home when he has no more and is hungry; the elder brother who will not recognise the scapegrace, but yet deigns to be jealous of him; the man who will not get up till he is compelled, to help a friend in an emergency; the judge who is more careful of his dignity than of the justice he is well paid to administer—

they are not criminal characters, but they are certainly not noble ones. Of course there is the good Samaritan on the other side, and the father of the prodigal, but there again Jesus is true to nature; He does not paint angels, but men. He knows it is natural to be kind and to welcome a lost son home, to render first-aid to a man lying on the roadside; but He also knows how greedy we are for pleasure, how ready to be jealous, how busy about our little dignities, how little we like to be bothered, how we resent the intrusion of uncongenial people into our preserves. He knows us inside out, and His irony is never far away from tears, yet He never gives a hint that He thought us small or mean because we do small and mean things. Even His invective against the Pharisaic scribes is rather a dirge over the incalculable mischief done by the sins of good people, that corruption of the best which is ever the worst, than a scorn which takes delight in seeing its victims wince.

## XXIII

### On Reverence

It is difficult for us to believe that Jesus could bring Himself to call any human beings by the opprobrious title of dogs and swine. The Syro-Phœnician woman is not called a dog, though her daughter seems to be called a "puppy." Children in Syrian homes are still allowed to make pets of very young dogs, but they are turned out into the street when they emerge from puppyhood. After that they are, of course, mere scavengers, without a home or an owner. "They make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city"; "even the dogs came and licked his sores." There was only one more deadly insult than to call a man a dog, and that was to call him a pig, and Jesus uses both these words here. It is inconceivable that He meant Gentiles; Paul, apparently calls anti-Christian Jews "the dogs" in Philippians iii. 2, but his employment of the word gives us no real parallel to its use here.

But we do find that Jesus is not by any means averse from calling men by animal epithets; we have "wolves," "sheep," "goats," "snakes," all applied to human beings in the Gospel. There is a curious parallel to be found in King Lear; Dr. Bradley suggests that during the period when he wrote the great tragedies, Shakespeare was haunted by the idea that men may be possessed by

what we call the "animal" sins. Our Lord tells us plainly and bluntly that there will always be dirty-minded people about, cynical, scandalmongering outsiders who will make the most of any bit of unsavoury gossip which comes their way. We are not to be altogether free and unreservedly friendly in all companies; we shall be well-advised not to give interviews to enterprising journalists, where the question at issue reflects upon the character of Christian people. We shall be careful of one another's honour, never telling tales out of school or washing our dirty linen in public; for we know that if we discuss each other's character too indiscriminately, those who listen with such sinister eagerness to our confidences will trample our treasure in the dirt; then, when our backs are turned, they will take away our character with equal relish and thoroughness; nor have any of us much character to lose. If we were treated as roughly as we sometimes treat each other, we should be unrecognisable when the process was over. There is an interesting parallel to this saying in the Book of Sirach: "Talk not much with a fool, and consort not with a pig; beware of him, lest thou have trouble, and thou art defiled when he shaketh himself" (Ecclesiasticus xxii. 13 [Hebrew text]); two other passages from the same book are worth quoting in this connexion: "Hast thou heard something, let it die with thee; be of good courage; it will not burst thee!"; "He that is hasty in reposing confidence is unwise . . . never repeat a word—then no one can reproach thee, speak not of it to friend or foe—unless it be a sin to thee, repeat it not" (xix. 4, 5, 10).

At this point we may, if we will, insert an unwritten



saying of Jesus, which underlies Jas. iv. 17 and perhaps 1 Cor. ix. 16, and is quoted in different forms by Justin and Irenæus; Ephrem, the Syrian father, cites it as from Tatian's harmony of the Gospels in the form "he who does not preach, commits a sin." The two sayings taken together mean, "you must preach, but be careful how you preach." It is probable, I think, that for "holy thing" we should read "signet-ring"—only a very slight change is necessary in the suggested Aramaic original; the "ring" corresponds much more nearly with the "pearls" in the second part of the verse. Did Jesus distinguish between the sacred and the secular? Quite a number of people are inclined to say "No" and to argue that the differentiation is an altogether mistaken one. Certainly an extreme emphasis upon such a distinction has led to many gross abuses, providing, for instance, an excuse for that shallow catchword "No politics in the pulpit." But when we say that Jesus made all life sacramental, all that we mean is: "He made our common life so sacred by sharing it with us that there is nothing that may not at any given moment become sacramental"—by "sacramental" I mean expressive of a sacred personal relationship. We do not infer that all material things are *equally* capable of flashing and glowing with the glory of a great spiritual reality. The world, Jesus asserts, is everywhere alive with God; He does not go on to say with the Pantheist that it is everywhere equally alive with God. "Every common bush" if you will; but it is quite possible that Jesus would have been more interested and would have seen more in the people who "sit round it and pluck blackberries" than in the bush.

A bootlace will not do for an engagement ring; it might for a time if there were no more fitting symbol at hand, just as a common nickel ring has served love's turn before now. There is a use for costly things, for gold and silver and jewels; they should not be too lavishly displayed, but kept as tokens of some precious spiritual possession which nothing that is not expensive can at all adequately represent. That is what costly things are meant for, not for personal display, but for the great occasion, for which nothing drab or commonplace will do. I need not refer to the classical instance of the alabaster box of precious spices, or to the reproof administered by Jesus Himself to the utilitarian critic at Bethany.

Christian reverence always has behind it this personal meaning consciously realised. The "Church" is not the building where the Church meets—there is good reason for calling that the "Chapel," if "meeting-house" is too prosaic for our taste—but the fellowship of believers who meet for worship there; it is not "God's house," for He does not dwell in "temples made by human hands"—the last "house of God" was the Temple at Jerusalem, and it ceased to be "God's house" when Jesus said "It is your house now, and you must keep it" (leaving out "desolate," which is not found in the best MSS. either of Matt. xxiii, 38, or Luke xiii, 35), and forthwith left the doomed building (Matt. xxiv. 1, 2), doomed because He left it for the last time. Ever since then we—"our bodies"—are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The idea so widely spread amongst trustees and other custodians of Church buildings that the premises are not to be used too much

is not a Christian notion at all—it may be Jewish or pagan, but it finds no warrant in the New Testament; the building is made for the people, not the people for the building. Even in what we are accustomed to call the “sacraments,” the real sacrament is the communion of saints with their Lord and with one another, not the altar at which they kneel or the bread and wine; strictly speaking, no one can *administer* the sacraments. With all deference to many devout Christians, the ills in modern Church life cannot be set right by what they call “reverence”—seemly and altogether desirable as that may be for other reasons—rather by a far more deeply-rooted respect for other believers, and a new care for the honour of the Church which God bought with the blood of His own, and which is the true body of Christ.

All the same, certain things will always be more suitable as expressions of devotion than others. All life is sacred since He has walked our way—

“Sacred is the soil  
Dear are the hills of God.”

We may meet Him on the mountain-top or by the roadside, when we walk together and are sad; we may see Him walking over the water, moving steadily on to His Kingdom amid the unrest of our times; we may be seated at table with our friends, never dreaming that He is anywhere near, and suddenly we may know that it is He who is breaking the bread, the soul of all good company, for He is “the goodly fere,” the great companion; we may suppose that it is the gardener, then turn round, our attention caught by an unwonted tone in the rough voice, and see Him looking into our face,

and calling us by our name; but He chose His symbols carefully, and there is a reason why bread and wine stand to us for the body and blood of the Lord. These are love-tokens which we shall not be inclined to handle every day and in all companies. We shall not quote His words too freely, using them as tags for our smart talk, or merely to score a point in argument. It is easy to do so, for they are familiar and strangely relevant in all kinds of contexts. That is because every trifling detail which has any sort of connexion with human life and love may, since He came amongst us, catch and reflect a gleam of the eternal. But we shall be careful never to let the familiarity and humanness of the words of Jesus, their native shrewdness and enlivening humour, tempt us to forget that they are His, that they are the words of eternal life.



## XXIV

### The Christian Adventure

IN verses 7-12 of chapter vii Jesus summarises His doctrine of God with inferences for the social life of man. God is our Father; unlike the gods of the heathen, He does not play practical jokes upon His children, for the things that He gives them are always good. We are to treat one another in the same spirit, entering without suspicion into that fellowship of giving and taking upon which the life of man with God, and of man with man, depends. The disciple will not be afraid of making demands upon God, his fellows, and himself, because he knows that, for the man who is content to feel his way through, to venture upon God and the world God made, through every labyrinth there is a way, and sooner or later the way will be opened. He takes it for granted that God is worthy of his trust, and knows that men, too, are worth believing in, unless he is forced to suspect them; in return he is eager to deal humanly with men, as he expects them to deal humanly with him. That is all that Jesus asks from us, but how much it is!

To begin with, trust in God; how difficult it is for us to venture on Him, to risk very much in the great speculation! Can we believe, as Jesus did in the wilder-

ness, that when He seems to give us stones for bread, we are to make the best of the stones, until something better comes along? To have to listen to a preacher without a message, to have to make the best of Church socials when the spirit is crying out for fellowship, is the hard lot of many a disciple of Jesus, and he is sorely tempted to try and find what he wants elsewhere, instead of settling down to make the best of the people in the place to which God has sent him. It is not very comforting to tell him—

“When the sermon is dull and the preacher lacks sense, God takes a text, and preaches patience,”

but it is true that the things that come to us, when we are following the path of obedience, are not only good, but the best things possible for us. God may not give us what can by any stretch of imagination be called “bread” when we ask for it; at any rate, what He sends will either be good already, or capable of being turned into something good. To give ourselves up to inglorious and uncongenial work, to believe that when our friends shake their heads and talk about our throwing ourselves away, that He can keep our souls alive without “bread” if He chooses, is in itself an adventure, a perpetual taking of risks.

It is equally hard for some of us to trust ourselves, to take up tasks which make a formidable demand upon powers which we suspect we were never meant to possess. The wrong kind of modesty—we will not call it mock-modesty, for it is quite sincere—is a continual trouble in Church life to-day; the usual answer, when we are asked to undertake some special work, is “But

you know that is not my line." This is not Christian humility, but simply lack of trust in the power of the Spirit of God. "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father." God is far more ingenious in the adaptation of means to ends than is generally supposed; the call would not have come our way, unless some provision had already been made to fit us for the work which is offered to us.

The problem "How far are we to trust other people" raises so many difficult issues that it will be well to leave it alone for the moment; it is bound up with two other questions, "Did Jesus trust men always," and "When we cannot trust men any longer, what then?" We shall attempt a reply to these questions presently. Meanwhile we may observe that the "golden rule" sums up very much of what we have been saying; if we should not like to have temptation or bad drains thrust in our children's way, we are to see to it, so far as we can, that the children of the poor are not forced to live without sun and air in their homes, with fumes in the air and odours rising from the ground, all poisonous; that they are given a chance to escape from the smell of alcoholic liquor. At least we can never rest content while such inequalities remain. And if we feel ourselves affronted when those above us in the social scale patronise us, we shall take care not to bribe the working man to be quiet with the stone of high wages and short hours, and deny him the only thing he really asks for, the bread of an equal fellowship. But it is all so difficult, indeed it is quite impossible unless a whole world of prejudice, of traditional feeling and temperamental shyness has been crucified in us at the Cross of

Christ, unless nothing else really matters to us but Jesus.

Is it too good to be true, this picture of the perfect life? We are not simple, but complicated creatures living in a still more complicated world. The gate—that simple love of Jesus which is the source of it all—seems to be too narrow and unpretentious to lead anywhere very much, and we wonder “Did Jesus really take into account all the facts?” We remember that He, like us, lived amid a highly-developed civilisation, and, though He and His first disciples were poor men, the men and women they preached to would be harassed by most of our social entanglements. It is said that on the direct route from Jericho to Jerusalem there is a point at which it is easy to lose one’s way, for what appears to be the main road only takes one down into the valley of Gehenna; to reach the city gates you have to turn sharply to the left through a narrow wicket-gate and take a rough unlikely-looking path. If that is so, the topical reference contained in this parable of the two ways is obvious. The trouble with the philosophy of Jesus is that it does not *look* ambitious or comprehensive enough. Luke, in the corresponding passage, has “Agonise to enter through the narrow door . . . for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able,” while Matthew has “gate” for “door,” and “few shall find it” for “many . . . shall not be able.” The difficulty, according to Luke’s report, does not consist in the discovery itself, but in availing ourselves of the discovery. Matthew is thinking of a gate leading to a road, Luke of a door to a house. At the beginning of the Christian life—if we follow Mat-



thew's version and regard the two as distinct sayings, as I am inclined to do—we have nothing to surmount except our disinclination to believe that the homely suggestions made by Jesus are adequate to our particular problem. Other and very formidable difficulties, we are warned, come later on, for the path, when the gate has been entered, is rough and troublesome; but the *decisive* crisis is passed when we have once brought ourselves to make the great experiment. The very fact that the approach to the way of life marked out in the Sermon looks so simple and unpretentious prevents many from making the venture; they think that there must be some other secret than mere love to Jesus and trust in the Heavenly Father to whom He has introduced us. We still hear of the “sublime impossibilities” of the Sermon on the Mount. Once the venture is made and the gate entered, a second great discouragement meets the seeker. The teaching of Jesus which at first sight looked so natural, complete, and satisfying as a theory of life, brings us up against all kinds of difficult and delicate problems when we begin to work and think it out in practice, and the way becomes troublesome indeed. Jesus Himself gives us the clue to their solution; we are to enter the gate without question as to where the road is going to take us, and then ask and feel our way, to take one step and live one day at a time, not to worry about problems till we are face to face with them, till some answer must be given to the questions they force upon us. The word we are to say will be given us when it is desperately wanted, not before; the mountainous barrier will break and melt away when all our plans for scaling

or circumventing it have failed, and we are driven to trust—commonly our last resort. We must not expect to get “full direction” at the beginning of our course, or ever to have in our possession a detailed chart of the way to the Kingdom; as the needful food is to be given us day-by-day, so the needed strength, the right word which we could never find if it were not put into our mouths, the bright, fresh illuminating idea, is not likely to be forthcoming until the time has come to use it.

## XXV

### “Other Foundation can no Man Lay”

SUCH is the life of the Christian believer, called to be an adventurous wanderer along an unfrequently and tortuous path all his days. It is certainly quite as much of venture as ever. Jesus has already told us that, though we must train ourselves to make allowances for everybody, there are some people we must not trust too much, some companies in which we cannot be quite open and unreserved. Apart from the mischief-makers referred to in v. 6, there are propagandists of every kind, men and women complacently sure of their own creeds, who beckon us another way. If the wanton scandalmongers are labelled “dogs” and “swine,” these others are called with equal bluntness, “wolves masquerading as sheep.” They profess themselves eager to learn, but their real purpose is to expose our simplicity and to increase their own self-importance. As Paul said of some of them: “It is all very well to have interest shown in you, when the motive is a good one; but these people’s interest in you is unhealthy; its purpose is that they may monopolise you and that you may have by and by to curry favour with them” (Gal. iv. 17, 18). The modern world, too, is full of propagandists, as greedy of spiritual influence as the profiteer is of material wealth, and quite as unscrupulous

as he; very dangerous, because very plausible and insinuating people. "You can tell what they are by the mischief they cause," says Jesus. The intolerant partisan, who thinks he must put charity second to courage because he is fighting for what he calls "the truth," proves that his doctrine is not true by the manner of his advocacy. The heresy-hunter is himself a heretic, but he reveals the fact not so much by what he says as by the way in which he says it. "A tree is known by its fruit"; if to be narrowly orthodox makes a man bitter and intolerant, or to be "advanced" makes him superior and contemptuous of the simplicity of heart he chooses to call credulity, we can only conclude that the orthodox man is not so orthodox as he thinks and that the advanced man is not advanced enough. Our bad manners in controversy too often rob our arguments of all their force.

Then Jesus goes on to warn us of another and a subtler danger, a danger particularly insidious in days like these when a kind of vague homage to the person of our Lord is fashionable. Almost everybody quotes His words nowadays, and more respect is shown to His name than ever. But it is one thing to find support for a theory, which we should hold on other grounds in any case, by the use or misuse of sayings of His; quite another to follow the way of self-forgetting love, whether we appreciate or understand the details of His teaching or not. We are all touched by Christian ideas, as we are all familiar with the language of ecstatic devotion; it is dangerously easy to imagine ourselves lovers of Jesus, because the mention of His name rouses in us a certain emotional and pleasurable



response. In certain moods we can find what we call rather vaguely “uplift” in the atmosphere created by the singing of hymns which express the rapture of the saints in the love of their Lord, and by the repetition and exchange of Christian sentiments; indeed the number of “helpful” addresses we have listened to and of “good times” we have enjoyed would be portentous, if we kept a record of them all. It is possible to live on phrases, and the emotional reactions their repetition produces, and to think we are Christians because we can enjoy the company of the true lovers of Jesus and feel better—in what sense it is difficult to say—when the atmosphere about us is Christian. A slight tincture of semi-Christian sentiment may prove, we should remember, the most effective prophylactic against infection by the real thing. True Christianity does not get into a man by saturation, by his soaking it from the air of home or Church; it is not to be bought ready-made to suit all sizes and shapes; if it is not our own possession, we can neither catch it from someone else, nor “go to them that sell,” its professional exponents, and get fitted in time to go in with the others into the wedding. It is nothing else than a direct and unmediated fellowship with the Lord Himself, an attachment, not to Christian ideas so much as to the person of Jesus, a willingness to take His word for it, though all the world and most of our own prejudices cry contradiction. It does not imply always a conscious realisation of His presence—Jesus says nothing about that here—it does involve utter obedience to the will of the Father in Heaven declared by Him. No mystical experience, no Christian associations, can take

the place of this practical obedience to what the Christian understands of the will of His Lord.

Jesus goes on to say a still more startling thing. It is possible to have been a successful evangelical preacher—for that is what “Have we not cast out demons” may be taken as meaning in current religious language—and yet be disowned at last. They—these miracle-workers—make the claim, and the King does not challenge their claim. In Luke the reference is rather to privilege: “Have we not eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and hast Thou not taught in our streets?” Here the appeal is based not upon intimacy with the Lord, but upon services rendered to His cause. Yet the Lord, in whose name they have achieved their mighty work, repudiates them, without attempting to minimise the greatness of the sins they have done. In Luke’s Gospel His answer amounts to: “It does not matter to Me where you come from, what your position has been”; in Matthew it is still more personal, “I never knew you.” There is one grain of comfort to be found even in this sombre warning; Jesus had faced the very perplexing difficulties that surround the whole subject of “visible results.” In the parable of the Sower He suggests that results quickly visible are often delusive, in that of the Seed growing secretly that *invisible* results always follow the preaching of the word; here He betrays His knowledge of the fact that the best men are often least successful, though they agonise for results, while men of inferior Christian character and experience carry all before them, and the fruits of their work abide. Because you have been a preacher successful in the best sense of the word, be-

cause you have done real good, it does not follow that you are Mine; you may go on doing good work, and yet the condition of your own soul may be such that I shall be obliged to disown all connexion with you. Does not this statement contradict what has just been said about the good tree and the good fruit? If the results are good, surely the preacher is proved genuine! But Jesus does not think of the preacher as responsible for the fruit; it is the seed which must produce its harvest. The “word” is the seed, the preacher is the sower; if the sower does his work, some of the seed is sure to grow, but that does not depend so much upon the character of the sower as the nature of the soil and the goodness of the seed. When He says “the tree is known by its fruit,” He is not thinking of preaching, but of character; we ought, I believe, to omit the question about “fruit” in the examination of candidates for the ministry. The amount of our success does not depend upon either the quality of our Christian character or the intensity of our experience, but partly upon opportunity, partly upon certain faculties which are rather physical and mental than spiritual. Moreover, to emphasise the desirability of visible results so much at the beginning is unhealthy because it is out of line with the teaching of Jesus; He distinctly asserts that invisible results are more trustworthy than those that are visible, and that results do not, anyhow, testify to the character of the sower, rather to the quality of the ground and the purity of the seed. This does not mean that the character or the experience of the preacher is of no importance, but that the amount of the visible fruit has no direct relation to any spiritual quality of



the sower except his perseverance. As this is a fact of everyday observation, I need not labour it. But we must take to heart the Lord's obvious meaning, that the fact that we have done so much or worked so long in the service does not by itself prove us His.

In the parable which concludes the Sermon there is an interesting difference between Matthew and Luke. Luke is thinking of the broad river valleys of North Syria, round his native Antioch; the floods are not so serious as in the narrower Palestinian wady which Matthew has in mind—all that is needed is that the builder should dig deep and lay his foundation on the mother-rock. Matthew, on the other hand, is not so much concerned with the depth of the building's foundations, or the trouble taken in laying them, as with the site. We are following the First Gospel, and as it is true to local conditions in Galilee we are fairly safe in assuming that we have here the most primitive version. The time for building is early summer. One man chooses a green and fertile valley of rich soil—one of the glens running down from the mountains of Upper Galilee to the lake. Galilee is exceedingly stony, and to get any depth of soil you would have to choose a narrow wady. The tenant would be sheltered there from the west winds which bring rain from the Mediterranean; so without further thought he builds his cottage there, and as the last days of summer and then of autumn pass, he congratulates himself upon his well-chosen site. But he has not noticed the lie of the land. For a time all goes well; the winds do not touch him and even in the winter he is sheltered and warm. Snow falls on the hills above, but does not trouble him,



and his fields and fruit-trees bear a rich crop. But the dangerous time has still to come; the rainy season comes and goes, and then the first warm days of the early Syrian spring and the melting of the snow. Then one night silently and suddenly the great brown flood comes rushing down, but he is too heavily asleep to hear the falling of banks and barriers; he wakes in the darkness—the rain is pouring down, the house rocks, then there is a crash and a choking muddy torrent comes surging in through the broken swaying walls. Perhaps he succeeds in crawling out, bruised and broken by the fragments of his own house; naked and shivering, he scrambles up to higher ground, then turns back to look at the desolation which an hour ago was his home. In a few weeks the floods subside, another venturesome builder settles there, and the same tragedy recurs. How old the temptations of life are! Yet they are always trapping fresh victims; every day sees the wrecking of young lives through the same follies exposed a thousand times over!

The other man chooses higher ground for his house—the land here is bleak and barren, with only a thin soil covering the bare rock. He is not heroic, but is just sensible; he lives in the same world as the foolish builder, but he takes obvious precautions, he sets about his work seriously, and the result is that his plain cottage sees the fall of house after house in the valley below. I am told that in the further East it is quite a common practice to put up a house for the summer months in a river bed; but woe to the man who lingers in his sheltered valley a week too long! Determinists tell us that we are the prey of our environment; Jesus

gives us the truth that underlies their contention when He says that if we build the house of our life on the wrong site a crash is inevitable. In the early years of life we make our own environment; in the later years the environment we have chosen makes us. This is very largely true; of course we are not free to choose our earliest surroundings; but out of the environment for which we are not responsible we make an environment for which we are. We may be born in a slum, but we choose our friends, and people have more to do than things with making us what we become. Most of us set about building our soul-home out of any material which comes handy. The most important thing is not the material we use—Paul says that on the true foundation we may build a house of gold and silver and decked with precious stones, or one of wood with its gaps stopped with hay and thatched with straw—but the site on which we build, the central reality round which we group the things and people we take into our life.

What a portentous claim is here! Jesus has swept us right away from the details of conduct to eternal verities, and there, as the one central reality for every man in all the world He sets Himself—not the moral law revealed in Scripture, the value of which for all time He has already proclaimed—but His words and His words only. He is the bedrock of human life, which he who goes deep enough in penitence and prayer shall find. But not only is He the rock beneath the surface of life, the ground of the universe; not only is He to be found in the earnest probing of the soul, when men are seeking for some solid ground to build and

risk all their fortunes upon. He is the Rock of Ages, rising above the surface of history, and those who have lost their bearings because they have built wrong can hide in the cleft of this rock which has weathered the storms of the ages.

But for young and old alike, for those whose building is still to be done and for those whose soul-home has collapsed, the one condition of security laid down by Jesus is that they should commit their fortunes to Him, that they should love before they understand or even guess where love will carry them. The religion He depicts to us is not based upon a sense of duty, not upon fineness of ethical perception or intensity of spiritual aspiration, but just upon such a love for Jesus as will impel a man to take a leap into the dark, not because he knows there is solid ground at the bottom, but because he is fascinated and can do no other; his impulse is the instinct of love and consequences are lost sight of for the moment. What holds us back is a fear, very natural to men and women who live in a world which flaunts contradiction to the teaching of Jesus every day, lest after all He may have been wrong, and we should be left disillusioned and humiliated at the end; there is so unspeakably much at stake. In my last chapter I want to face up as well as I can to this obstinate fear, and to show how the whole of the great Sermon needs the supplement which only the Cross and the Resurrection can give.

## XXVI

### The Last Fear and the Way Through It

IF we are to take the great risk and surrender ourselves to this inexorable demand, we have a right to stop and ask the question "How can we be sure that Jesus was not Himself a mistaken idealist? Does not His claim sometimes seem almost insane in its extravagance?" He does not claim merely to be the perfect teacher of a new way of life, but to be Himself the sole foundation on which the life of man in time and eternity can be built without disaster. We begin His great pronouncement with blessings upon men and women who are distinguished by certain general virtues, we end it with everything else left in the background, faced with a supreme personal demand. He no longer says "If you are meek and merciful, if you are a peacemaker and pure in heart, you shall outlast the storms of time and be secure of the Kingdom," but "He that heareth *My* words and doeth them shall be like a man whose house is built upon the rock." What credentials has He and what has become of those who have made the venture with Him? We cannot afford to take refuge in generalities; so unspeakably much is at stake and at stake for us, in the answer.

We may say first of all that at least He was always consistent, that He was not content with teaching us



that the way of love and trust is the one secret alike of service to others and security for ourselves; He lived a life that never deviated from the path He marked out for us, He staked everything Himself upon the victory of sheer love. He taught us that force is no final remedy, that God is our Heavenly Father and will see the man who trusts Him through. He also taught us with equal insistency the essential goodness of human nature—though, as will appear later on, there is something more to be said on this point—at least that nothing can alter the fact that all men are God's children and our brothers; but He also learnt what obedience must cost us "by the things that He suffered." If we do not try to explain away the cry of despair on the Cross, we shall come to see that at any rate at the end He was left without any resources not available to us, except the power to love and suffer on in regions of experience where we cannot follow Him even in thought. When we are asked the question: "If as the Gospels declare, there were things which Jesus did not know and things He could not do, where does His divinity come in?" the answer surely is in His love, for He emptied Himself of all *but love*, and the love of God can never, by its very nature, let go. But are we to think of a high ideal breaking down under the stress of actual life? At any rate, we must face the facts.

Could Jesus always trust men? If He could not, how can we? If it is true that men have only to be brought together as men, not as representing a certain point of view or as members of a party, that if they could only be simple and natural, all their differences might be settled, how is it that He was despised and

rejected by the mass of men? What is the use of our saying "*If they would only be simple,*" when the history of all that has happened since His coming compels us to believe that for the great majority of those whom He came to win this condition never has been and never seems likely to be fulfilled? In the days of His flesh He did gather some few waifs and strays about Him, despised fishermen, outcast publicans, men and women who, for one reason or another, belonged to no group and represented no interests but their own; but what of the rest of humanity in that and every succeeding generation? Is He justified by the outcome or is Schweitzer right, when He suggests that Jesus made a divine miscalculation, but a miscalculation after all?

We look back over the ground we have covered and can see here and there, even in the Sermon, that Jesus had faced these perpetually recurring questions, questions which seem to challenge His whole view of God and man. We remember that sudden plunge into gloom "*If the light that is in you be darkness*"—as it is, so that after all Jesus does teach something like the actual depravity of the heart of man—"how great the darkness will be!" "*If you, being evil*"; He assumes the evil in our dispositions without argument. Out of the mind of man darkened by suspicion and prejudice come not only all the crimes and scandals that disgrace the life of the world, but also all the uncertainty and disunion that paralyse the work of His Church. Jesus was never, at any stage of His ministry, a sentimental dreamer.

He spoke also, and with increasing frequency and emphasis as His own dark hour drew near, of a "dark-

ness outside." The "inner darkness" of the Sermon becomes, unless the light of trust in God and man somehow breaks in, sooner or later an "outer darkness." By the "outer darkness" He meant no removed place of punishment, but the inevitable reproduction in his environment of the darkness in a man's own soul. The horrors and abominations of wartime were an inner darkness first in the minds of the war-lords and their peoples, before they wrought themselves out in the devastated areas, but none of us realised how far the corruption had gone until it expressed itself in the ruin and misery of Europe. The selfish man by and by makes a wilderness about him; only then does he perceive that he is in the outer darkness; but he is only reproducing, as all men must, the truth of himself in his surroundings. Hell itself is but a condition of the soul, only realised when it begins to be reflected back from the life a man has made for himself. Jesus was an unflinching moral realist, and has made it unmistakably plain that for the man who cannot trust anyone else there can be no place but the darkness outside. The fellowship must be very patient with him, but in the last resort it must protect itself against the contagion of distrust. The power of excommunication is in set terms given to His apostles, as it was exercised by the Lord Himself. Judas had to go out into the night to his own place, because while he was at the table fellowship was impossible; for the sake of the others he is dismissed.

Are we left then with a little circle of light and a great outer ring of darkness? Did Jesus give the world up? If He did, if the darkness in the soul dis-



qualifies us for any permanent place in the company of Jesus and His friends, what hope is there for any of us? We do not need telling that jealousy, greed, and suspicion are the deadliest of all sins, for we know they killed the Lord of glory; we know also that, if we surrender to them, we are not fit for any fellowship of which Jesus and His little ones are members; yet scarcely one of us in a thousand can really look out upon the world with the unclouded eyes of a little child. Is the Sermon, is Christianity, meant only for people with specially beautiful and unspoilt souls?

To this question at least Jesus Himself offers an answer. The men who thronged to the King's wedding-feast were a motley crowd of undesirables; the fact that in the phrase "both bad and good" the bad come first suggests that they were in the majority. The only one to be turned out was the man without the wedding-garment who disliked his fellow-guests more than he loved the King. The great Sermon preaches to us the loftiest of all ideals, but the foundation of the house of life which is built before our eyes is not first of all trust in God or man, an ideal to which most of us are not yet equal, but love for One who has taken the risk of trusting us first, a love of which every man, so long as he remains a man, is at least capable. We have seen that before we can say "Get right with God" we ought to say "Get right, if you can, with men; if you have made an honest attempt to live on the right human terms with your brother, God will not be slow in coming to terms with you." But the Gospel goes further back; its essential message is "Get right with Jesus, and your love for Him will make you brave and



simple enough to get right with men." Jesus whom we are to love and trust is not simply the Teacher who bade us believe in our Father, each other, and ourselves. He is our Elder Brother, and has gone our way before us. He not only brought the light; He carried it into and through the actual darkness.

There was a time when *His* faith in men was clouded; if we cannot pray as we should without trust in the people in whose company we pray, neither could He, when His human environment had gone all awry. Still, though He knew us unworthy of His trust, He hoped against hope, for His doomed country, for Judas; if He did not, why make that last appeal to the city at the Triumphal Entry, why wash the feet of the traitor and share the sop with him? The cursing of the fig-tree, His weeping over Jerusalem, the tragic dismissal of Judas, tell us how hope died in the Saviour's heart. In Gethsemane He longed for home, for the sure hold upon His Father which had always been His, but He drank the cup unflinchingly when the time came, though He knew what it was costing Him. In his very beautiful manual on "The Meaning of the Cross" (Epworth Press) Rev. W. R. Maltby tells the story of a working man in the North of England whose wife, soon after her marriage, drifted into vicious ways, and went rapidly from bad to worse. He came home one Sunday evening to find, as he had done a dozen times before, that she had gone on a new debauch. He knew in what condition she would return, after two or three days of a nameless life. He sat down in the cheerless house to look the truth in the face and to find out what he must do. The worst had

happened too often to leave him with much hope, and he saw in part what in store for him. Now that a new and terrible meaning had passed into the words "For better, for worse," he reaffirmed his marriage vow. Later, when someone who knew them both intimately ventured to commiserate him, he answered, "Not a word! She is my wife and I shall love her as long as there is breath in my body." She did not mend and died in his house after some years, in a shameful condition, with his hands spread over her in pity and prayer.

We could scarcely find a more moving example of perfect human love; but the love of Jesus went further than this. Let us suppose, for the sake of illustration, that there were children of this tragic marriage, so that the mother could not be taken home as she was. The husband left them, let us say, in the charge of a relative, and followed the prodigal until he found her. He could not induce her to come home; she only wanted to be left alone, she said. So he stayed with her, though he could not live the life she was living or breathe the air she breathed. He could be of no use to her, for his presence only exasperated her, until the time came when he could not pray but only feel. Even then his love would come short of that of Jesus, for the love of Jesus was God's love just because the barrier which in the last resort prevents any one of us quite putting himself in his brother's place was not there in His case. Those of us who have known what it was to sit by the bedside of the one we love best and wait for the "turn," to try to feel and pray while the hours dragged themselves along, know something of

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the love of God, but we do not know all, for though we would have given anything to go down into whatever strange border-region the beloved is passing through, we know that we cannot; we cannot get outside ourselves; there are stages on the journey where no human companion can go with us. Jesus did; when the Good Shepherd found the lost sheep, *He "put it on His shoulders."* There is truth in the suggestion that when He cried "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me," He was most truly God, because He was most truly one with lost humanity.

Perhaps the best shot at the meaning of the Atonement that has ever been made since the New Testament was written can be found in the children's hymn:

"He knew how wicked man had been,  
He knew that God must punish sin;  
So, out of pity, Jesus said,  
He'd bear the punishment instead."

But can we say punishment? Would not "consequences" be better? No; for it was not only a question of holding on to the individual sinner; we must be redeemed as a race, or not at all, for we are all bound up together; the worst thing about sin is that someone else beside the sinner suffers first and most by it. Before the Cross Jesus was able to save individual men and women; since then He has not only been doing that, but redeeming the race. Whether we can any longer attach any definite meaning to such an abstract phrase as the "moral law" or not, the Cross must express the wrath of God against sin as well as His love for the sinner; the blood of Jesus must cry out more loudly than that of Abel against murder and

all that makes for murder. We may, if we will, say that God first made clear to us in the Old Testament what sin did with ourselves and each other, and, when that did not avail, what it was doing with Him, in the New; that the Cross is His supreme protest, His verdict upon the sin of man. But it is more; not only does Jesus sum up in Himself all the wasted good of the world, the innocent blood shed the world over from the time when man first learnt to be jealous of his brother, but He proves that the good is never wasted, if only the one sinned against can love enough. God and man are one in ideal, or Jesus could never have come in human flesh and blood. But they are drifting further apart every day; with man as he is, it is not enough to say "Come home" or even to persuade him to come by the promise of a welcome; in the first place home would not be to his taste, and, in the second, it would be home no longer if all comers were admitted without more ado; that would simply be bringing the darkness into the light.

In face of this tragic impasse, there is nothing to set except Jesus. Christian thinkers could only explain what they found in Him by saying that the universe had been built about Him, that He is the secret, the ultimate essence of humanity. Nothing—no conceivable sin or doom—could ever make us anything but His brothers. This Jesus knew from the beginning; what He did discover was what it was going to cost Him to be indeed our Brother. We may say reverently that He staked everything upon the truth of His own consciousness, that in His person God and man were one, though the time came when they seemed to



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be one in no other way. There was a time when He felt Himself forsaken with a lost world; but the dark hour passed, for love found out a way when trust and hope were gone. He never refused to face the facts which point to heartbreak and despair; His eyes were always wide open, nor was His fear for us or for Himself the sudden tremor which visits us in moments of depression; it sprang from a knowledge of the power of "the evil one in the world" which no one else has been brave or pure enough to share. He gives us dark hints and bids us be afraid too. He died, not because He was disappointed, or half in love with easeful death, but because to go on loving us, being what we proved ourselves at the Cross, meant the eclipse of the peace which had sustained Him in His life with us so far. Then suddenly fear leapt to His heart, for He knew now that the doom which He was afraid of for us was shadowing Him also. He conquered just because being what He was, He loved as far as love can go. By His victory a redeeming power has been set free in the life of men, which is a world-force like sin, but is stronger, because it has not merely like sin, the solidarity of the human race behind it, but the all-penetrating power of the love of God. There is no man in any world where men can be whom it cannot reach; there is no thread in any part of the tangle of human relationships into which it cannot find its way. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound"; as sin meets us at every turn, so does the grace of God in Christ, the one as inexorable in its unescapable demand as the other is relentless in its unescapable consequences; but it is stronger than sin, because it has

taken possession of the worst thing that sin has ever done, or can ever do, the murder of Jesus, and made it for all time the symbol of its redeeming power. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have the life that knows no death."

If Jesus, the light, made Himself one with a world forsaken in a darkness of its own making, the darkness is passed, for the light has gone down into whatever depths there are, and *has not been overcome*. If He can reach lost souls, there can be no soul of man hopelessly lost; if He has thrown Himself in with the fortunes of a forsaken world, the world is not forsaken. He cannot at least be less than God, for, if He is not divine, there is something greater than God in life. Now we can give ourselves away with both hands all the time without the last fear which might, but for the Cross, hold us back, the fear lest we should sink ourselves, lest our faith should fail us. He has been our way before, and has found bottom for us; we need not fear the risk of despair, for there is one thing at least in the world beside high hope and bitter disappointment; there is the God revealed in Jesus, who has inspired us with the one and will support us through the other, "the Author and Perfecter of our Faith." If we lose all else, at least we have Him, and with Him we can learn to trust the untrustworthy, even ourselves, for His sake, who "has raised our human nature to the clouds at God's right hand." Simple love for this Jesus, the casting of all our doubts and fears, of all the fortunes of our high endeavour, upon Him, brings back the child-heart, and with the child-heart, the life described in the great Sermon becomes at last possible.





















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